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SENSIBILITY IN THE NOVELS OF JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

by

Mary P. Boyles

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Approved by


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APPROVAL PAGE

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In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term "sensibility" denoted "quickness and acuteness of apprehension or feeling; sensitiveness" and the "capacity for refined emotion; delicate sensitiveness of taste; and readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in literature or art" (OED). Although sensibility is not historically synonymous with "sentimentality," excessive sensibility can and often does degenerate into sentimentality. In American literature such exaggerated sensibility is a pervasive ingredient in the sentimental novel.

Although the novels of James Fenimore Cooper contain examples of the kind of extreme feeling which characterizes the sentimental novels, such excess is not typical of the sensibility displayed by Cooper's characters. By and large, sensibility for Cooper refers to the use of intuition rather than reason as the guide to truth and conduct in human relations. Reliance on such intuitive guidance reflects nobility of character. The possessor responds with moral imagination to the major areas of human experience: family relationships, station in society, interrelations with fellow human beings, attitude toward country, response to nature and the arts, and

relationship to God. The sensibility exhibited by Cooper's characters serves as an index to the author's moral vision of the world.

Considering Cooper's background and his theory of "natural inequality" in mankind, it is not surprising that sensibility emerges frequently in Cooper's "upper class" characters. In his earlier novels, however, Cooper locates the quality in representatives of other classes as well: Natty Bumppo, certain Indians and the Spy, for example. In the European novels, particularly The Bravo and The Headsman, Cooper not only portrays the dangers of oligarchical governments parading as republics. He also underscores the failure of sensibility in the representatives of those governments.

In his later novels, after his return from Europe and after the beginning of his quarrels with the American public, the tenor of Cooper's presentation of sensibility changes. He becomes increasingly less willing to attribute the quality to mankind in general. It becomes almost exclusively the mark of the Effinghams, the Littlepages, the Woolstons, the Wallingfords. The trait continues to signify noble character, but the class grows smaller as Cooper grows older and more disillusioned.

In addition, the author becomes more strident and caviling in his treatment of sensibility and more irritable at the unhappy ramifications of its absence in certain classes of Americans--especially the Yankee and those

influenced by him. The sanctity of the family unit, once insured by tradition and hereditary property, becomes threatened from without by trespassers and anti-renters. The patriotism of the Effinghams and the Littlepages is colored by a carping irritability about the country's shortcomings. The natural landscape, though constantly in danger from the white man's "wasty ways," is nevertheless always impressive and moving to the sensitive observer on the promontory. In the last novels, that landscape assumes the more urgent function of making that observer humbly cognizant of his own insignificance in the universe and of the absolute necessity of placing his dependence upon Providence. It is no longer enough simply to be a declared, practicing Episcopalian. Cooper felt that in the small class of men and women who comprise the natural repository of manners, tastes, and moral principles lay the hope of America; in the antithetical vulgar majority lay the threat of destruction.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Called upon to deliver a eulogy at the memorial service for James Fenimore Cooper, Daniel Webster, a member of the ambivalent public which made Cooper's final years miserable, inflicted what Leslie Fiedler calls the "last indignity": "As far as I am acquainted with the writings of Mr. Cooper, they uphold good sentiments, sustain good morals, and maintain just taste."¹ As a eulogy, the statement is embarrassing: it begins with an admission of ignorance of the subject and ends with a triple cliché that might well adorn the tombstones of a dozen sentimental novelists. Yet, for all its weakness as a final tribute to America's first true man of letters, the statement happens to identify three important elements of Cooper's novels.

Cooper's novels do "uphold good sentiments, sustain good morals, and maintain just taste"--not merely in imitation of the conventional literary romances of the period, but rather because Cooper believed that "good sentiments" and "just taste" reflect "good morals." Indeed, in the novels of Cooper, the sensibility exhibited by his

¹Love and Death in the American Novel, rev. ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 190.

characters serves not simply as an ingredient in a novel of romance; rather it is an index to the author's moral vision of the world.²

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term "sensibility" denoted "quickness and acuteness of

²Cooper criticism has not been concerned at all with sensibility in relation to Cooper's novels. Some of the best Cooper criticism deals with the moral ramifications of his fiction. Marius Bewley, The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959), shows the relationship between morality and the narrative mode in Cooper's best work. Charles A. Brady, "Myth-Maker and Christian Romancer," American Classics Reconsidered: A Christian Appraisal, ed. Harold Gardner (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), sees Cooper as the only major nineteenth-century creative writer "to work specifically within a religious dimension," p. 81. Frank M. Collins, "Cooper and the American Dream," PMLA, 81 (1966), is one of the few critics who consider Cooper's fiction as a whole in terms of his moral and religious views. Donald Ringe--probably the best critic writing on Cooper today--also treats Cooper as the author of thirty-two novels, not just author of a few adventure tales here and a few novels of social criticism there. Ringe deals with Cooper as a "serious artist who could generate an important moral theme from the skillful handling of his material," James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), p. 22.

Other criticism of Cooper, besides that interspersed in the biographies of Thomas R. Lounsbury, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1882), and James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), is primarily of two types: that dealing with the Leatherstocking Tales, such as the American Adam thesis in R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955), and David Noble, "Cooper's Leatherstocking and the Death of the American Dream," AQ, 16 (1964), 419-31; and that dealing with Cooper's social criticism such as Vernon Parrington's Main Currents in American Thought, II (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1927-30), 222-237; Robert Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times (New York: Minton, Balch, and Company, 1931); and Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 43-65.

apprehension or feeling; sensitiveness" and the "capacity for refined emotion; delicate sensitiveness of taste; and readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in literature or art" (OED). The concern with sensibility and feeling was a part of the reaction against two philosophies which, though beginning at opposite poles, seemed to posit the same unattractive view of man: Hobbes's theory that man is no more than a self-regarding, self-seeking creature; and Locke's interpretation of the mind as a tabula rasa, blank at birth and thus devoid of any natural feeling or impulse. The reaction is especially evident in such philosophers as Lord Shaftesbury, who, in Characteristics (1711), offers an estimate of man as an essentially good being with an innate moral sense, "a natural sense of right and wrong."³ Basil Willey points out that Francis Hutcheson and David Hume support Shaftesbury's view in their claim that "our moral judgments, like our aesthetic judgments, are not the offspring of Reason at all; but proceed from an inner sentiment or feeling which is unanalysable."⁴

³Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, ed. John M. Robertson (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1964), I, 265.

⁴The Eighteenth Century Background: Studies in the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period (Boston: Beacon Press, 1940), pp. 108-09.

Even the terms "sentiment" and "sentimental" did not originally have pejorative connotations. In the opinion of Sterne, who "invented" the terms, partaking empathically of the great Sensorium is a positive experience. In The Sentimental Journey (1768), Parson Yorick's ability to "translate," that is, to interpret from the merest gestures and the minutest feelings the soul of another human being, results in the constant awareness of man as a part of God's creation. Sterne presents Parson Yorick with some irony when he gets carried away with taking pulses of young ladies and grieving for dead asses. When, on the other hand, Yorick feels remorse for having refused alms to the Monk of Calais and regret for the plight of the ruined and jilted Maria, Sterne treats these reactions with all the sympathy the man of feeling deserves.

As Ian Watt points out in an essay on Austen's Sense and Sensibility, such emphasis on feeling and imagination as opposed to reason and will was indicative of a radical change in the view of man's basic nature.⁵ One of the extreme literary consequences of this shifting emphasis, especially in the fiction of the final decades of the eighteenth century, was the degeneration of sensibility into sentimentality in its modern sense as "the effort to

⁵"On Sense and Sensibility," Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Company, 1963), p. 45.

induce emotional response disproportionate to the situation, and thus to substitute heightened and generally unthinking feeling for normal ethical and intellectual judgment."⁶

Such degenerated sensibility is Jane Austen's target in Sense and Sensibility. The novel is not meant to be a blanket dismissal of sensibility, but rather a corrective realized through the ironic treatment of Marianne Dashwood's excesses. Exaggeration is the keynote as Marianne declares that she could not be happy with a man "whose taste did not in every point coincide with [her] own."⁷ She weeps over and pronounces elaborate eulogies to a house and a tree she must leave. The ironic corrective is clear when Jane Austen declares of her: "Marianne would have thought herself very inexcusable had she been able to sleep at all the first night after parting from Willoughby. She would have been ashamed to look her family in the face the next morning, had she not risen from her bed in more need of repose than when she lay down in it."⁸

In American literature, such exaggerated sensibility is a pervasive ingredient in the sentimental novel.

⁶Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature, 3rd ed. Based on the original by William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1972), p. 489.

⁷Sense and Sensibility (1811; rpt. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1933), p. 13.

⁸Austen, p. 69.

Herbert Ross Brown pinpoints the connection when he identifies the "Tearful triune of sentimental beauties: Suicide, Seduction, and Sensibility."⁹ In William Hill Brown's epistolary novel, The Power of Sympathy, published in 1789--the year of Cooper's birth--there is much anguish and weeping when Harrington, in love with Harriet, learns that she is his sister: she dies of heartbreak and he commits suicide. Harrington the Elder, the father whose sins are being visited upon the succeeding generation, has a vision in which he sees the damned seducers--including himself--being hissed even by the other damned reprobates in hell. In Susanna Rowson's Charlotte Temple (1791), the weeping and swooning continue, and again "over all hangs the furious menace of the seducer."¹⁰ It is not enough for Mrs. Rowson that the sensibilities of her characters are heightened to the point of bursting forth in floods of that "precious fluid." She mines each incident for all its sentimental ore in her tearful exhortations to the reader:

Ye giddy flutterers in the fantastic round of dissipation, who eagerly seek pleasure in the lofty dome, rich treat, and midnight revel--tell me, ye thoughtless daughters of folly, have ye ever found the phantom

⁹The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860 (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1940), p. 155.

¹⁰Carl Van Doren, The Cambridge History of American Literature, ed. William Peterfield Trent, et al. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1917), I, 285.

you have so long sought with such unremitting assiduity?

.
Yes, my young friends, the tear of compassion shall fall for the fate of Charlotte, while the name of La Rue shall be detested and despised. For Charlotte, the soul melts with sympathy; for La Rue, it feels nothing but horror and contempt.¹¹

Beginning his writing career in the midst of such literary excesses, James Fenimore Cooper could hardly be expected to escape completely from their influence. Even a casual reading of Cooper's novels yields a number of conventions of the sentimental novel. Coincidences abound in Cooper: more than once, strangers who meet accidentally in the middle of the ocean turn out to be members of the same family; genteel heroes are always at the ready when genteel heroines need to be rescued from overturned carriages, gun shots, cannibalistic Arabs, and the paws of ferocious lions; letters found by chance reveal life histories that have been shrouded in mystery for years.

There are references to seductions and attempted seductions in Cooper's novels (Precaution, Lionel Lincoln, and Deerslayer), although a kind of innate delicacy saves Cooper from dwelling on this element of the "tearful triune." Like the young women of the sentimental novels, Cooper's heroines remain sublimely lovely, even after days of desperate flight through the forest or frightful

¹¹Susanna Rowson, Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth (1791; rpt. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), pp. 66, 140.

tossing in makeshift rafts. In fact, except for the "penetrating eyes," the "suffused cheeks," the "profuse locks" and that ultimate in feminine modesty, a "small hand which seemed to blush at its own naked beauties,"¹² Cooper's heroines are strangely bodiless. Babies, for example, seem to come directly from heaven. In Wyandotté, the author suddenly announces: "Beulah had now been married more than a twelve-month [he decorously informs the reader] and was already a mother" (p. 173). Cooper is not even immune to employing that sentimental medical phenomenon, death from unrequited love. Grace Wallingford, always ethereal in demeanor and behavior, begins slowly and irrevocably to waste away once she realizes that Rupert Hardinge no longer means to honor, either in the letter or the spirit, their betrothal made years before.¹³

In addition, excessive feeling which degenerates into sentimentality surfaces on occasion in Cooper's novels. In The Last of the Mohicans, Colonel Munro bends over his kidnapped daughter's footprint, "nor did he rise from his stooping posture until Heyward saw that he had watered the

¹²James Fenimore Cooper, The Pilot: A Tale of the Sea, p. 102. This and all subsequent references to Cooper's novels are to The Works of James Fenimore Cooper, Mohawk edition, 33 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹³Brown, Sentimental Novel in America, p. 298, points out that in the Wallingford novels, Cooper "exhausted every possibility of sentimental appeal while the broken-hearted Grace died of a lingering decline."

trace of his daughter's passage with a scalding tear" (p. 222). Cooper's heroines often feel so intensely and so powerfully--especially in tête-à-têtes with Cooper heroes--that only a "paroxysm of tears" or a "wordless swoon" provides sufficient release from pent-up emotions. This type of exaggerated reaction occurs in Wyandotté in a scene involving Maud Meredith and Beulah Willoughby. The Willoughbys adopted Maud when her parents died, and the two girls have grown up together knowing that they are not sisters. When Maud makes a casual reference to their lack of true kinship, Beulah "turned pale; she trembled all over as if in the ague; then she luckily burst into tears, else she might have fainted" (pp. 85-86).

Such excess, however, is not typical of the sensibility displayed by Cooper's characters. In fact, Cooper was actually in revolt against both Gothicism and the sentimentality of the novels of his day. In his examination of Cooper's theory of fiction Arvid Shulenberger points out that Cooper's prefaces to the early novels reveal as his one major theoretical concern his "argument for realism, for literal detail and truth of representation."¹⁴ W. C. Brownell also identifies Cooper's "solid alliance with reality" as the "unique distinction" of his romance.¹⁵

¹⁴Cooper's Theory of Fiction: His Prefaces and Their Relation to His Novels (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas, 1955), p. 11.

¹⁵American Prose Masters (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 16.

In his first preface to The Spy (he wrote five prefaces for this novel from 1821 to 1849), Cooper comments on the tastes of that portion of his audience which would be most likely to expect the sentimental pap of the day. The passage bears quoting at length because, in addition to spoofing the demand of the sentimental reader for Gothic castles and dashing heroes, Cooper for the first time touches upon a subject which would be of continued concern to him, and later to Hawthorne and James: the "poverty of materials" for the writer in America.¹⁶ Too, the passage is appealing because of its refreshing lightness of tone, which is unhappily absent in the later Cooper:

We would not be understood as throwing the gauntlet to our fair countrywomen, by whose opinion it is that we expect to stand or fall; we only mean to say, that if we have got no lords or castles in the book, it is because there are none in the country. We heard there was a noble within fifty miles of us, and went that distance to see him, intending to make our hero look as much like him as possible; when we brought in his description, the little gipsey, who sat for Fanny, declared that she wouldn't have him if he were a king. Then we traveled a hundred miles to see a renowned castle to the east, but to our surprise, found it had so many broken windows, was such an outdoor kind of place, that we should be wanting in Christian bowels

¹⁶ Cooper returns to this subject in the third preface to The Spy (1822); in 1828 in Notions of the Americans, Picked Up by a Traveling Bachelor (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1963), II, 108; in the preface to the 1832 English edition of Lionel Lincoln; in the preface to Home As Found (1838); and in the 1850 preface to The Red Rover. Hawthorne's complaint occurs in the preface to The Marble Faun and James's in his Hawthorne.

to place any family in it during the cold months: in short we were compelled to let the yellow-haired girl choose her own suitor, and to lodge the Whartons in a comfortable, substantial, and unpretending cottage. We repeat, we mean nothing disrespectful to the fair--we love them next to ourselves--our book--our money--and a few other articles. We know them to be good-natured, good-hearted,--ay, and good-looking hussies enough: and heartily wish, for the sake of one of them, we were a lord, and had a castle in the bargain.¹⁷

Cooper returns to the subject in Chapter Nine of The Pilot, where he deliberately dissociates himself from both the Gothicism of dark castles and the sentimentality of exaggerated pathos. He is describing the castle on the coast of England, where Colonel Howard has temporarily retreated with his niece and his ward when the unrest in the colonies becomes alarming: "There were divers portentous traditions of cruel separations and blighted loves, which always linger, like cobwebs, around the walls of old houses, to be heard here, also, and which doubtless, in abler hands, might easily have wrought up into scenes of high interest and delectable pathos. But . . . our business is solely to treat of man, and this fair scene on which he acts" (p. 89). Obviously, Cooper wished to avoid identification with that "damn mob of scribbling women," who became the bane of Hawthorne's existence.¹⁸

There is a far more important and more complex difference between Cooper and the sentimental novelists.

¹⁷Preface to the first edition of The Spy, 1821. Quoted by Shulenberger, Cooper's Theory of Fiction, pp. 14-15.

¹⁸Caroline Ticknor, Hawthorne and His Publisher (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1913), p. 141.

Under the influence of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume, the "novel of sensibility" developed one basic tenet that Cooper, a moral absolutist, could never endorse: the doctrine of natural benevolence, or the perfectibility of man, the idea that since man has a natural "moral sense," training is unnecessary and may even be corrupting.¹⁹ Cooper was neither a man who could be dazzled by claims that his fellow humans are sinless, nor a writer who could blithely portray shortcuts to perfectibility.

Frank M. Collins has shown that Cooper, in his formal stance, was always the "austere rigorist," recognizing the need for training and vigilance "to keep down the sullen tiger of the aboriginal impulse."²⁰ Like Robert Montgomery Bird and Walt Whitman, however, Cooper was fascinated with the idea of rejecting Europe as the inevitable condition of fallen man. He hoped that perhaps the landed gentleman and the yeoman in America were somehow immune to temptation. Nevertheless, what Cooper was finally forced to accept was the "balance of good and evil, of omnipresent temptation in all things and cultures."²¹

Nor did Cooper have any of the sentimentalist's faith in the sudden improvement in human nature. In The

¹⁹Ian Watt, "On Sense and Sensibility," p. 44. See also Brown, Sentimental Novel, pp. 142-54.

²⁰"Cooper and the American Dream," 79.

²¹Collins, 94.

Redskins, Cooper scoffs at these "improvements upon improvements" which "very often come out at the precise spot from which they started" (p. 242). Instead of such "improvements" Cooper advocates traditional, conventional methods of training in both manners and morals--not some newfangled, progressive approach to behavior and morality. In Oak Openings, Cooper declares: "The notion of setting up anything new in morals is as fallacious in theory as it will be found to be dangerous in practice" (p. 319).

That Cooper is a moralist is hardly surprising for a man of his background and principles. His belief in the moral intention of art has, of course, the dignity of a long tradition behind it. Too little critical attention has been paid, however, to the moral implications of Cooper's themes and to his own statements about those themes. Of all the critical offenses committed by Mark Twain upon The Deerslayer, perhaps the unfairest and most devastating is that of reducing a story of considerable moral import to a badly bungled adventure tale. For all his prolixity, his dullness, his lack of craftsmanship, Cooper never quite deserved Mark Twain.

Cooper is in fact often praised for his inventiveness as a storyteller and for the fullness of his imagination. Certainly, story overshadows any significant preoccupation with form and technique; as Brownell notes, Cooper predates these artistic concerns in American

literature.²² It is also true, especially in his early books, that Cooper began his novels for seemingly very off-hand reasons: he wrote Precaution to answer a dare; The Spy to assuage his guilt; The Pioneers to please himself; and The Pilot to show up Scott's ignorance of the sea.²³

Yet these were only superficial stimuli. Every one of Cooper's novels had a moral purpose at the inception and a moral import in the unfolding. Just how consequential that moral import was to Cooper is illustrated in his review of J. G. Lockhart's Narrative of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart. It is Scott's lack of moral purpose in his novels which Cooper finds untenable:

We scarcely know a writer who so often limited his object to a pleasing exhibition of manners and customs, without any ulterior moral aim, as Scott. . . . His sole object was to direct the imagination of the reader, or perhaps it were still truer to say, that he gave vent to the workings of his own fertile imagination, and dashed on paper the passing images of

²²American Prose Masters, p. 11.

²³In the preface to The Pioneers, 1832, Cooper says he wrote Precaution "because I was told I could not write a grave tale." In A Letter to His Countrymen (New York: John Wiley, 1834), Cooper says, "Ashamed to have fallen into the track of imitation, I endeavored to repair the wrong done to my own views by producing a work [The Spy] that should be purely American," p. 98. Again in the preface to The Pioneers, 1823, Cooper contends that he wrote his third novel "exclusively to please myself." In the preface to the English edition of The Pilot, 1831, Cooper recounts the conversation about The Pirate which ended in his determination to write a better sea novel.

his teeming brain, without other thought of any moral consequences, than a proper care not to offend.²⁴

Cooper even intimates here that Scott may be guilty of some of the excesses, particularly the exploitation of the imagination, which characterize the sentimentalists. He goes on in the review to attack Lockhart's "pretension" that to "Walter Scott is the world indebted for the healthful class of novels that have succeeded, and indeed eradicated, the sickly sentimentalism of the old school." Such a contention, says Cooper, "is so extravagant as almost to amount to audacity."²⁵

In A Letter to His Countrymen, Cooper distinguishes between a "minor plot" and a "major plot" in his discussion of The Bravo.²⁶ By minor plot, he meant the events of the story, the literal narrative; by major, he meant the theme or ideal conflict--in other words, the "moral aim" of the story. It was this major plot that Scott lacked, and it is this major plot that serves as both the impetus and the guiding principle of Cooper's own fiction.

In all of Cooper's novels, sensibility is inextricably bound up with the moral philosophy inherent in his themes. In the novels written before 1835, its sole function is to act as an indicator of moral worth. The

²⁴Review in The Knickerbocker, or New York Monthly Magazine, 12 (October 1838), 363.

²⁵Knickerbocker, p. 363.

²⁶Letter to His Countrymen, pp. 12-13.

Handbook to Literature defines sensibility as "a reliance upon the feelings as guides to truth and conduct as opposed to reason and law as regulations both in human and metaphysical relations."²⁷ Cooper's use of the concept in his fiction reflects this formal definition, not that sensibility which could be defined only by "reading between feverish asterisks, hectic exclamation points, and quivering dashes."²⁸ As the novelists of the Rowson school use the term, sensibility is an index to sentimentality; as Cooper demonstrates the concept, sensibility is an index to character. The sentimentalists exploit the word in a vain attempt to conjure up the meaning: "Hail Sensibility! Ye eloquent tears of beauty!" (The Power of Sympathy); "Blest Sensibility! Exquisite meliorator of the mind!" (Ferdinand and Elizabeth). Cooper, at his best, employs the principle so effectively that apostrophes to the word are unnecessary.

Sensibility is a warm, open reaction commensurate with the event, action, or idea which called forth the response in the first place. Sentimentality, on the other hand, is emotional anarchy. While both conditions exist in Cooper's novels, sometimes even in the same character, they are not difficult to distinguish. In The Spy, for example, when Frances Wharton believes that Peyton

²⁷Holman, p. 485.

²⁸Brown, p. 76.

Dunwoodie loves Isabella, she makes the grand sentimental gesture of giving him up:

"No Peyton, you are formed for great and glorious actions, deeds of daring and renown, and should be united to a soul like your own; one that can rise above the weakness of her sex. I should be a weight to drag you to the dust; but with a different spirit in your companion, you might soar to the very pinnacle of earthly glory. To such a one, therefore, I resign you freely, if not cheerfully; and pray, oh, how fervently do I pray! that with such a one you may be happy!" (Spy, p. 234)

This is pure melodrama. Yet, when Frances is genuinely and profoundly moved by the beauty of the landscape after a storm, her appreciation of the scene is expressed only in her countenance. When the stranger, Harper, recognizes her feeling for the scene and comments briefly on its sublimity, Frances still does not speak, but she immediately senses that there can be "no danger apprehended from such a man. . . . such feelings belong only to the virtuous" (Spy, p. 46). Her intuition is correct, of course, since Harper is Cooper's fictional version of George Washington.

Sensibility, then, is the capacity to respond with intelligence and perception to aesthetic or moral events and values. The noble actions of Cooper's sensitive characters stem more often from intuition than from "law honesty" (a particularly odious guide to conduct in Cooper's view). The possessor of sensibility responds with moral imagination to the major areas of human experience: decorum and manners, family relationships, station in

society, interrelations with fellow human beings, attitude toward country, response to nature and the arts, and relationship to God.

Behavior in the drawing room may seem to the modern reader only a superficial kind of sensibility. In Cooper's world, however, decorum and manners, while they constitute the simplest level on which sensibility operates, are vital indicators of early and continued moral training in both male and female characters. Decorum involves especially relationships between the sexes. From the point of view of plot, these relationships appear to be the trite, conventional love stories of the sentimental romance; on a deeper level they are related to the ethical basis of society. In the female, whether mother or daughter, the failure of decorum and manners is almost always a failure in moral perception. Jane Moseley in Precaution, like Marianne Dashwood in Sense and Sensibility, errs in her choice of a lover because she shares with her mother a fatal blind spot: mistaking outward polish for true sensibility. Sarah Wharton of The Spy makes the same kind of fatal misjudgment and is saved from marriage to a scoundrel only by the vigilance and courage of Harvey Birch. In Cooper's heroines, like Emily Moseley, Frances Wharton, and Alice Munro, decorum and manners reflect a well-developed sense of values.

The sensitivity that is the result of background, breeding, and education is demonstrated also by Cooper's genteel heroes. They are the gentlemen for whom Cooper and his father before him serve as prototypes. These young men, like Cooper's heroines, always superior in physical appearance, are well-bred, cultured, magnanimous, courageous, and--as Donald Ringe says--"Episcopalians to a man."²⁹ The beau ideal of the group is Lord Pendennyss of Precaution; he is followed by Peyton Dunwoodie of The Spy, Oliver Effingham of The Pioneers, Edward Griffith of The Pilot, Duncan Heyward of The Last of the Mohicans, the Effinghams of the Home novels, the Littlepages, Miles Wallingford, and Mark Woolston.

Even in the drawing room these heroes are distinguished by their manners, by their conversation, and by their response to the arts. In Precaution, when Lord Pendennyss reads from the poetry of Campbell, Emily Moseley is struck not only by the purity and eloquence of his reading, but even more so by the natural spontaneity with which he reflects the ideas of the poet (p. 113). In Home as Found, Cooper identifies such spontaneity with sensibility: "Taste, whether in the arts, literature, or anything else, is a natural impulse, like love. It is true both may be cultivated and heightened by circumstances, but the impulses must be voluntary, and the flow of feeling, or of soul,

²⁹James Fenimore Cooper, p. 151.

as it has become a law to style it, is not to be forced, or commanded to come and go at will" (p. 79). In identifying the aesthetic sense as "natural," Cooper recalls the Shaftesbury school; in suggesting that the impulse "may be cultivated," he hints at his own interest in the role of education and breeding.

A failure of male sensibility in the parlor is usually tantamount to the exploitation of manners and polish by hypocritical Englishmen, like Egerton of Precaution, Wellmere of The Spy, and Warley of The Deerslayer, who, effectively disguised by their suavity and their English titles, stand ready to pounce upon innocent--if unwise--young ladies. Their façades are penetrated only by Cooper's morally perceptive heroines, such as Emily Moseley and Frances Wharton.

Concern with family relationships is basic to Cooper's moral philosophy. Not only does the family unit, backed by property and tradition, provide a necessary social structure in the community, but it is also the major training ground for moral and religious development. The cultivation of sensibility is basic in this training: members of Cooper's fictional families--like members of the author's own--feel deeply their love and concern for one another. It is true that in dramatizing this love, Cooper sometimes hovers dangerously over the abyss of sentimentality--and occasionally falls in. Threats to the family's stability,

however, whether through fragmentation or dissolution, provide a serious and prevalent theme in Cooper's fiction. The subject figures prominently in more than a dozen novels, including The Spy, The Last of the Mohicans, The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish, The Bravo, The Headsman, Wyandotté, the Littlepage trilogy, and the Wallingford novels.

Another common theme in the novels, the search for identity--a theme Cooper borrows from the sentimental novelists--is often manifested as the crucial search for family. For Harry Wilder in Red Rover and Paul Powis in the Home novels, finding out who they are is equivalent to locating their places, and thus their responsibilities, in society. On the other hand, Natty Bumppo's name is known but seldom used. The fact that his name is not an identification but a description places Natty, for the most part, outside the ordinary concerns of society.

Cooper's gentlemen are Episcopalians not only because that is the denomination with which Cooper himself was associated, but also because Episcopalians act as a kind of objective correlative for religious sensibility.³⁰ In the early novels, especially Precaution and The Pioneers, Cooper stresses the dignity and effectiveness of the

³⁰Robert Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, records that the author's father, Judge Cooper--despite his Quaker heritage--early adopted the view of the New York aristocracy: there might be ways of getting into heaven other than through the Church of England, but "no gentleman would choose any of them," p. 30.

Episcopal service. When Oliver Effingham of The Pioneers adds his manly and moving voice to the Episcopal service, Elizabeth Temple is impressed not only by his knowledge of the service, but also by the sensitivity of his presentation. Their willingness to participate in church services often separates Cooper's Christian gentlemen from his merely ethical gentlemen.

When Cooper moves out of the drawing room and into the larger world--the village, the forest, the sea--the quality of sensibility gains in complexity. The moral field widens as the physical horizon extends. Feminine decorum assumes greater dimensions as the genteel heroine encounters the white hunter and the displaced Indian brave. She, like her male counterpart, must come to terms with the relationship between law and "natural right" in the wilderness. She must determine not only her "manners" in relation to the Indian, but also her reaction to his contention that he is the victim of the white man's aggression.

The Cooper gentleman is also adept at fulfilling his obligations to those who depend on him for economic, social, and religious leadership. Although Cooper might have argued with Shaftesbury over man's basic nature, he would have agreed with the English philosopher that excessive "self-concernment" is a "vicious affection," while concern

for the public good is laudable.³¹ For Marmaduke Temple of The Pioneers, the public good takes precedence over mere personal desires. When, at the end of the novel, he returns to Oliver Effingham his estate, he bequeaths to the young man not only the legacy of land, but also the legacy of Christian leadership in the community. Peyton Dunwoodie, Oliver Edwards, and Duncan Heyward function not only as technical romantic heroes, but also as the founders of American democracy and the agrarian economy. Natty Bumppo may have been, as D. H. Lawrence contends, Cooper's secret self,³² but philosophically at least Cooper is committed to the Oliver Effinghams and the Corny Littlepages.

The forest is an even more complicated testing ground for the genteel hero: he is faced with the ever-advancing frontier, with war, with the claims of the Indian. The forest may yield its secrets readily to Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, but it is unfamiliar ground to Duncan Heyward and Jasper Western. The rules of the village, the sea, or the military camp do not always apply in the forest. Sometimes intuition is the only safe guide to conduct: Duncan Heyward (Last of the Mohicans), with no real evidence of Magua's treachery, accepts Natty's offer

³¹Shaftesbury, Characteristics, I, 248.

³²Studies in Classic American Literature (1923; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 49.

of help because he feels Hawkeye's sincerity; Corny Littlepage (Satanstoe) intuits the honesty and sensitivity of Susquesus when all others are mistrustful of the Indian.

The man in whom deference and submission may be virtues in the drawing room must, on the sea subordinate all such reserve to the obligation of leadership. While Cooper's use of the ship as a microcosm lacks the literary sophistication of Melville's handling of the symbol (although the Montauk in Homeward Bound is an effective social world), the ship provides a rich testing field for Cooper's heroes. The good sea captain, like Harry Wilder and Miles Wallingford, seems to know instinctively when to assert his command, or, like Edward Griffith of The Pilot, when to bow to greater skill. The difference between Griffith and Barnstable is the difference between a firm but graceful assumption of responsibility and a petulant catering to romantic whim. In addition, it may sometimes be the difference between life and death.

Like The Spy and Lionel Lincoln, the sea novels also investigate the sentiment of patriotism, a major theme in the first decade of Cooper's writing career. The quality and its relationship to sensibility were still points of significance to Cooper when he wrote the fourth preface to The Spy in 1831:

Of all the generous sentiments, that of love of country is the most universal. We uniformly admire the man who sacrifices himself for the good of the community

to which he belongs: and we unsparingly condemn him who, under whatever plea of sophism or necessity, raises his arm or directs his talents against the land to which he owes a natural allegiance. . . . There is a purity in real patriotism which elevates its subject above all the grosser motives of selfishness, and which in the nature of things, can never distinguish services to mere kindred and family. It has the beauty of self-elevation, without the alloy of personal interest.³³

In novels where the action occurs before the quarrel with England became a real issue, Cooper is content with allegiance to that country, or with some profession of love for both countries, such as that demonstrated by the Pilot and Lionel Lincoln. When the choice becomes central, Cooper's most sensitive characters in the earlier novels are staunch American patriots. One of Cooper's most unsympathetically presented characters is Mr. Wharton of The Spy, whose loyalties fluctuate with the threats to his property. In the Red Rover, Cooper's Byronic figure, and the Skimmer of the Seas, his picaresque hero, their love for America, along with their obvious gentility, in some measure redeems the unorthodoxy of these heroes.

Appreciation of the beauty of the natural landscape is characteristic of all Cooper's sensitive men and women. Donald Ringe has identified the significance of the landscape to Cooper: "Cooper believed sublimity of the natural scene struck awe into the mind of the observer that he

³³The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1831), p. v.

might perceive his own insignificance in contrast to the might of the Creator and thereby become filled with the proper spirit of humility."³⁴ The affinity between natural beauty and morality is central to the concept of sensibility in Cooper and aligns him with the Hudson River School of artists. In fact, Cooper numbered Thomas Cole and Thomas Doughty among his personal friends.³⁵ The panorama, the theatrical perspectives, the sublimity are as much a part of Cooper's descriptions as they are a part of Morse's "Niagara Falls from Table Rock" and Doughty's "In Nature's Wonderland."

Cooper liked nothing better than to transport a group of characters to some promontory from which they might view the vast expanse of lake and forest. Just as Sterne's Parson Yorick "translates" in his encounters with other human beings, so Cooper's sensitive characters--Natty, Harper, Frances Wharton, the Effinghams--"translate" as they stand before scenes of natural grandeur. The reaction separates the sensitive, intuitive soul from the unfeeling, calculating mind. The most common response of

³⁴"Man and Nature in Cooper's The Prairie," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 15 (March 1961), 315.

³⁵The moral affinity between Cooper and the Hudson River artists is the subject of two articles: Howard Mumford Jones, "Prose and Pictures: James Fenimore Cooper," Tulane Studies in English, 3 (1952), 133-54, and Donald Ringe, "James Fenimore Cooper and Thomas Cole: An Analogous Technique," AL, 30 (1958), 26-36.

the keen observer is the recognition of his own inconsequence in the universe. This reaction is so closely tied to morality that no Cooper villain, whether openly malevolent or insidiously corrupt, ever displays it, and few good characters of any significance fail to do so.

Considering Cooper's own background and his theory of "natural inequality" in mankind,³⁶ it is not surprising that sensibility emerges frequently in Cooper's upper class characters. In men and women of the English nobility in Precaution, in the genteel, well-educated heroes and heroines of The Spy, Lionel Lincoln, the Leatherstocking Tales, the sea novels, and the later novels of social criticism, Cooper provides ample demonstration that birth and breeding constitute a background in which sensibility thrives.

Before 1835, however, sensibility is not confined to the upper class. Cooper also locates the quality in representatives of humbler station. Harvey Birch of The Spy stands as the literary lodestar of the sentiment of patriotism. Tremaine McDowell has shown that Cooper made significant revisions in The Spy in 1831, when the novel was chosen by Colburn and Bentley in Great Britain as the third volume in a familiar series known as "Standard

³⁶James Fenimore Cooper, The American Democrat (1838; rpt. Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), p. 41. Subsequent references will be cited in the text as AD.

Novels." Cooper deliberately modified the character of Harvey Birch, eliminating those passages in which the Spy degenerated into a "mouthing, fearful creature" with "sunken and cowering eyes."³⁷ The effect of this alteration is to elevate Harvey in the social scale and to invest him with considerably more sensitivity than he had in the original version. While he was refining Harvey's character, Cooper also "discovered that excessive sensibility might be as indecorous as vulgarity, and he therefore dried the tears in numerous eyes, including those of black Caesar, loosened Isabella's clasped hands, and caused her eyes to cease their frenzied rolling."³⁸

Edwin Cady calls Natty Bumppo Cooper's "great natural gentleman,"³⁹ but the designation of "gentleman" is best reserved for the men of Cooper's genteel class. Some of Natty's rough edges are smoothed as he "grows younger" and assumes mythic dimensions, but he remains generally untutored and unpolished throughout the Tales. He is unrivalled, however, in his appreciation of the landscape and his humility before God's grandeur. His awareness of the painful desecration being wrought upon the land by the white man's "wasty ways" surpasses even

³⁷"James Fenimore Cooper as Self-Critic," SP, 27 (July 1930), 513.

³⁸McDowell, p. 514.

³⁹The Gentleman in America (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1949), p. 129.

Marmaduke Temple's. His exquisite sensitivity to the displacement of the Indians equals their own.

The contention of Roy Harvey Pearce that Cooper was interested in the Indian as a vehicle for understanding the white man⁴⁰ is demonstrated in the sensibility of the Indian. The sensitivity of certain of Cooper's Indians, especially Chingachgook, Hard-Heart (The Prairie), Conanchet (Wept of Wish-ton-Wish), and Susquesus (the Littlepage trilogy), is reflected in their eloquent ubi sunt speeches, requiems for lost yesterdays, when the "children of the Lenape were masters of the world" (Mohicans, p. 367). Cooper depicts bad Indians (Magua, Mahtoree in The Prairie, Arrowhead in The Pathfinder) as well as good, but there are certain intuitive responses in the Indian character which he finds especially appealing. Nearly all of Cooper's Indians are innately courteous, even to their enemies. They always listen with quiet attention, whether they agree with the speaker or not. They harbor a special reverence for two groups: the old (Trapper Natty, Mark Heathcote) and the mentally deficient (David Gamut, Hetty Hutter, Whittal Ring of The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish). Cooper's Indians may be, as General Lewis Cass contended, "of the school of Mr. Heckewelder, and not of the school of

⁴⁰The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 212.

nature,"⁴¹ but they nevertheless become, under Cooper's pen, effective contrasts to the all too often grasping and insensitive white man.

Sensibility surfaces even in characters who are otherwise relatively crude and untutored in manners: John Mohegan of The Pioneers, Betty Flanagan of The Spy, Long Tom in The Pilot, Abigail Pray in Lionel Lincoln, and Mrs. Bush in The Prairie. Cooper was no primitivist, however. Even in these simple persons, sensibility is not the "natural moral sense" espoused by the sentimentalists. The sensibility of Cooper's characters operates within the context of an orthodox view of man's relationship to God and his fellow man. These characters are not Episcopalians, like almost all of Cooper's genteel heroes and heroines, but directly (in Natty's references to his training from the Moravians) or indirectly in their conventional views of what constitutes right and wrong, they reflect the moral training they have somewhere received. Ozema of Mercedes of Castile, perhaps the only character Cooper created who lives entirely by natural impulse, refreshing and appealing as she is in her near-naked beauty, violates Cooper's cardinal element of sensibility: moral perceptiveness. If, as one critic has said, Cooper deliberately fired the bullet that kills the forward,

⁴¹Gregory Lansing Paine, "The Indians of the Leatherstocking Tales," SP, 23 (January 1926), 28.

warm-blooded Isabella Singleton of The Spy, it is just as obvious that he fanned the fever which conveniently carries off Ozema just after she offers to become Don Luis' Number Two Wife.

Cooper continues to locate sensibility in the humbler classes in the European novels, which serve as a link between the earlier, more romantic novels and the later novels of social criticism. He intends in these novels to unmask the dangers of oligarchical governments parading under the guise of liberty. His concern is not simply political; he also underscores the failure of sensibility in the very people who, because of background, wealth, and station, are in the best position to have developed the quality and to use it in their obligations to those under their care.

In The Bravo, the Council of Three refuses to recognize the love and concern of Antonio, a poor fisherman, for his grandson; at the same time, the government manipulates and exploits the love of Jacopo, the Bravo, for his father. In The Heidenmauer, the Abbot of Limburg and the Count of Hartenburg, by virtue of their high positions, are obligated to direct the religious and secular lives of the humble classes. Unfortunately, the only concern of these two men is the struggle for economic power in which they are engaged. In The Headsman, the government insists upon maintaining the hereditary position of public

executioner, even though the Headsman of the story "would not willingly harm the meanest creature which has been fashioned by the will of God" (p. 380). In all three of these European novels, while some members of the ruling classes behave with sensitivity, the quality emerges primarily from the lower classes in characters like Antonio, Jacopo, and the Headsman's family.

Throughout Cooper's novels, true sensibility is a reflection of selflessness and nobility of character. The quality may be exploited as it is by Egerton and Wellmere; it may be improperly channeled as it is in *Red Rover* and the *Skimmer of the Seas*; it may be monomaniacal as it is in Ralph of Lionel Lincoln, and to some degree in Mr. Gray of The Pilot; it may be exaggerated into sentimentality as it is in Jane Moseley of Precaution and Sarah Wharton of The Spy; it may be malevolently perverted as it is in the Reverend Meek Wolf of The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish. Whatever its manifestations, the quality is ever for Cooper an index to the individual's system of moral values.

In his later works, after his return from Europe and after the beginning of his quarrels with the American public, the tenor of Cooper's presentation of sensibility changes. It is obvious from letters written to him and by him that Cooper believed himself the object of much unfair criticism even while he was still in Europe. At any rate, on his return from Europe after an absence of more than

seven years, Cooper re-entered his country with feelings of deep distrust. He had gone out like a lion in 1826, honored at a dinner given him by the Bread and Cheese Club, which he had established. He returned in 1833, not like a lamb, but like a suspicious irascible old bear.

Though he considered himself a democratic gentleman, he found it impossible to follow one of the cardinal rules that his fictional gentlemen live by: ignoring personal criticism. Consequently, Cooper was soon embroiled in libel suits resulting from critical reviews of The Bravo and later the Effingham novels. These latter works dramatize, without much subtlety, the Three Mile Point controversy and Cooper's growing disenchantment with his country.

Sensibility continues to signify noble character, but the number of possessors grows smaller as Cooper grows older and more disillusioned. There are still representatives from the lower classes who possess sensitivity: Truck in the Effingham novels, Marble in the Wallingford novels, and Betts in The Crater. Two facts are worth noting about these three men. First, they are all professional seamen, a class always dear to the heart of Cooper, himself a seaman for several years of his early manhood. Indeed, it is not until Captain Stephen Spike of Jack Tier (1848) that Cooper can bring himself to draw a thoroughly insensitive, truly malevolent seaman. In

addition, all three men guide their conduct by the recognition and declaration that they are inferior in background, breeding, and education to the genteel heroes whom they serve.

It is true that Natty Bumppo, in The Pathfinder and The Deerslayer, is still as attuned to the glories of the landscape as ever and still as innately delicate in certain areas of his behavior. In fact, as he "sloughs off the old skin,"⁴² he loses much of the coarseness and crudity of the Leatherstocking of The Pioneers. What he never loses is that "deference that is due from him who is not a gentleman, to him who is" (AD, p. 85).

The Pathfinder (1843) is concerned primarily with the investigation of class distinctions.⁴³ More than any other Leatherstocking Tale, it explores manners and social station. Cooper makes clear that class lines are not only inevitable but desirable. The failure to recognize the responsibilities of one's social station can result in moral corruption, as in the case of Muir. On the other hand, the failure to recognize the limitations of his social station and background almost leads Pathfinder into a marriage unsuitable for both himself and Mabel Dunham. Natty withdraws his suit only when he realizes that there

⁴²Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 53.

⁴³Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 83, discusses the social implications of this novel.

is a depth of sensibility in the feelings of Jasper Western--the result of background, breeding, and education--that is inaccessible to the rough-hewn scout.

Sensibility becomes almost exclusively, therefore, the mark of the Effinghams and the Littlepages. In the drawing room, Eve Effingham is sharply differentiated by her manners, and thus by her morals, from Miss Ring, who would not dream of walking across a room without an escort--preferably six of them--but who is an inveterate and malicious gossip. In The Redskins, Mary Warren's reserve and feminine delicacy throw into bold relief the actions of Opportunity Newcome, the "new-coming," money-hungry, husband-hunting middle-class woman. Opportunity is never guilty of a lapse of sensibility; in her, the quality simply does not exist. There are no Opportunity Newcomes in Cooper's early novels, because Opportunity is a sign of the times that seemed to Cooper to have erupted during his European sojourn.

The gentleman, who in the earlier novels stands in dignified opposition to those exposed scoundrels, the English officers, now has a new and far more formidable enemy: the demagogue, the democratic leveler, who threatens the very foundations of American democracy. While Aaron Thousandacres' warped logic and perverted scripture-quoting are effectively countered by the Chainbearer, the Dodges, the Newcomes, and the Strides are another matter. These

latter men are the most dangerous because the most insidious; they represent evil without fangs, speciously declaring themselves exponents of liberty and champions of the majority. Since they are scrupulously "law honest," it is only through their total lack of sensibility that they are exposed as morally corrupt.

In the final analysis, moral sensibility distinguishes the small aristocracy of worth--"the natural repository of manners, tastes, tone, and to a certain extent the principles of the country," (AD, p. 84)--from the vast antithetical majority. By the late 1830's, Cooper has come to believe that the hope of America lay in this small group. Most of the novels that follow The American Democrat (1838) seek to show that the gentleman--not the gentleman of feudalistic aristocracy, but the gentleman of the aristocracy of worth--has, after all, a necessary place in a democratic society. Such an aristocracy of worth is the only bulwark against the dangers of leveling, a process that may be upward in theory, but is downward in practice.

Most of the bouquets which Cooper optimistically handed America in Notions of the Americans (1828) had turned into brickbats by the time he came to write The American Democrat in 1838. Although Cooper considered himself "as good a democrat as there is in America" (AD, p. viii), he had completely lost patience with those

representatives of the vulgar majority who would deny the possessors of "manners, education and refinement" the opportunity and the freedom to enjoy these attainments (AD, p. 89). Consequently, Cooper becomes more strident and caviling in his treatment of sensibility as he recognizes the ramifications of its absence in the democratic levelers, especially the Yankee and those influenced by him.

Having already established in his early novels the importance and sanctity of the family unit, Cooper, in the later novels, attacks with a vengeance those who threaten its very structure. The Three Mile Point controversy was not, for Cooper, a simple case of trespassing. That public which commandeered the Cooper/Effingham property did so out of total disregard not only for private property, but also for the traditions and sentiments which gave the land a supra-legal value to its owners. It is particularly this latter disregard that brings down Cooper's ire in Home As Found upon the "committee" which hands Edward Effingham its list of "resolutions" concerning the dispensation of property to which the public has absolutely no legal or moral right.

Cooper's scathing treatment is trained just as mercilessly on the anti-renters. Their total disregard for the rights of others, like that of the trespassers, is an outgrowth of their crude, self-seeking natures. It never occurs to Jason Newcome and Joel Strides that

Ravensnest (Satanstoe) and The Huttred Knoll (Wyandotté), which these two Snopesian Yankees stand ready to appropriate to their own use at the earliest opportunity, represent a father's careful and loving investment in his children's future. The only question asked by Newcome and Strides about any act is this: can it be given the semblance of legality? Ethics do not enter into the matter at all.

Cooper set up his portrait of this democratic leveler in The American Democrat:

The demagogue is usually sly, a detractor of others, a professor of humility and disinterestedness, a great stickler for equality as respects all above him, a man who acts in corners, and avoids open and manly expositions of his course, calls blackguards gentlemen, and gentlemen folks, appeals to passions and prejudices rather than to reason, and is in all respects, a man of intrigue and deception, of sly cunning and management. . . . (AD, p. 93)

In the novels that follow, Cooper never deviates from this portrait. Steadfast Dodge, Jason and Seneca Newcome, Joel Strides--their names reflect the venom of Cooper's pen. They are all physically unattractive, cowardly, coarse, cunning, and grasping. Their god is Public Opinion; a desire to serve that god prompts Steadfast Dodge in Homeward Bound to the ridiculous scheme of trying to get up a "comity" (Yankee for "committee") to pass judgment on the Captain's decisions about steering the ship.

The sentiment of patriotism continues to occupy Cooper, but national pride is neither so simple nor so unqualified as the early novels present it. Even though

Colonel Howard is not treated with the sympathy Cooper offers to the American patriots in The Pilot, he nevertheless identifies those dangers of the cry for "Freedom!" which return to haunt the later Cooper. He declares of the American struggle for independence: "A scheme to elevate the wicked at the expense of the good! a project to aid unrighteous ambition, under the mask of sacred liberty and the popular cry of equality! as if there could be liberty without order!" (p. 236). The Cooper of the 1840's might well have applied those words to the democratic levelers--even without the benefit of a fictional mask.

In The Spy, Mr. Wharton's attempt at neutrality is pictured as unreservedly malignant; in Wyandotté, the indecision of Colonel Willoughby is portrayed as the understandable caution of a man who refuses to join heedlessly in the cry of "My country, right or wrong!" In the Effinghams and the Littlepages, all conscientious Americans, the glow of patriotism is often dimmed by criticism of the country's shortcomings.

In the courtroom, Cooper won many of his legal battles against the press, usually conducting his own defense and doing a highly creditable job. Nevertheless, these technical successes were only momentarily satisfying to Cooper. They never had the effect Cooper desired: spurring the American press to a purifying self-examination or reanimating the public interest in Cooper's writings. In

fact, the caustic and often unfair criticism was replaced in the last few years of his life by an even more damning reaction from the press and the American public: silence.

Consequently, Cooper's despair and disillusionment increased in his final years. Convinced that the small aristocracy of worth was dangerously close to losing its battle against the greedy, money-grabbing middle-class, Cooper began to suggest an even further refinement of religious sensibility in his final sea novels: Christian intuition. For Miles Wallingford (the Wallingford novels), Mark Woolston (The Crater), Harry Mulford (Jack Tier), and Roswell Gardiner (The Sea Lions), Christian humility is not simply a facet of these characters. Cooper describes their conversion-like experience in language which suggests a mystical encounter. The heroes emerge from these epiphanal experiences with a new understanding of their relationship to God and man.

The following pages explore the relationship between sensibility and morality in Cooper's fiction. Chapter Two, "In the Drawing Room: Manners and Morals," investigates sensibility on its simplest level, the domestic. Chapter Three, "In the Larger World: the Village, the Forest, and the Sea," examines the more complex dimensions assumed by sensibility as the characters move into situations of greater moral intricacy.

Chapter Four, "Cooper, Europe, and the Power of Sympathy" demonstrates that Cooper's positive view of the American character remained unchanged during his sojourn in Europe. His European novels, especially The Bravo, make clear Cooper's belief that democracy fosters sensibility in those governed by it. Chapter Five, "Cooper's Return to America: the 'Shock of Recognition,'" explores the causes, both biographical and political, which resulted in the decline of Cooper's uncritical attitude toward his country.

Chapter Six, "Social and Moral Sensibility in the Final Leatherstocking Tales," shows how Cooper's altered view of the American capacity for the development of sensibility is reflected in The Pathfinder and The Deerslayer. Chapter Seven, "The Decline of Sensibility," explores Cooper's portrayal of the degeneration of the positive qualities in the American character and the continuing struggle of the small "aristocracy of worth" to retain its social and moral sensibility. At the same time, this chapter reveals how Cooper's disgruntlement with the failure of sensibility in the mass of Americans is reflected in the Littlepage heroes as an unattractive stridency. Chapter Eight, "Cooper's Last Novels: Sensibility as Christian Humility," examines Cooper's last four sea novels as illustrations of his final and most sophisticated definition of sensibility: the attainment of Christian intuition.

CHAPTER II

IN THE DRAWING ROOM: MANNERS AND MORALS

The term "manners" is defined as the "prevailing systems or modes of social conduct of a specific society, period, or group." Such a dictionary definition fails, however, to convey the feeling and the atmosphere which are so much a part of what we mean by "manners"--and which are, consequently, so difficult to express in a logical definition. Lionel Trilling has come closest to capturing the almost indefinable emotional aura of the term:

What I understand by manners, then, is a culture's hum and buzz of implication. I mean the whole evanescent context in which its explicit statements are made. It is that part of a culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning. . . . They make the part of a culture which is not art, or religion, or morals, or politics, and yet it relates to all these highly formulated departments of culture. It is modified by them; it generates them. In this part of culture, assumption rules, which is often so much stronger than reason.¹

Perhaps, then, even more than historical or sociological accounts of an era, the novel of manners portrays the Zeitgeist of a particular period.

¹"Manners, Morals, and the Novel," The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (1950; rpt. Garden City, New York: The Viking Press, 1960), pp. 206-07.

In Notions of the Americans, Cooper indicted America on the grounds that it had "no manners for the dramatist . . . no gross and hardy offenses against decorum for the moralist."² By the time he made these statements in 1828, Cooper had already written eight novels, all of which deal in varying degrees with manners, both English and American. After 1828, he was to write twenty-four more novels: in all of them Cooper's concern with manners is evident; in some of them, like the Home novels and the Littlepage trilogy, manners is the central subject. Moreover, despite Cooper's complaint that in America there are "no gross and hardy offenses against decorum," his interest as a moralist is precisely those offenses. As James W. Tuttleton points out, Cooper--as well as Henry James and Edith Wharton--surprisingly transcends conditions which seemed to him insurmountable.³

In Cooper's novels, the "hum and buzz" of manners identified by Trilling pervade the domestic scene. They are sometimes unmistakable in overt statements and significant actions. At other times, they are evident only in hints and tiny suggestions: the color of a dress, the

²Notions of the Americans Picked Up by a Traveling Bachelor (1828; rpt. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1963), II, 108.

³The Novel of Manners in America (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 27.

movement of a foot, the depth of a blush, the level of an eye, the pitch and intonation of a voice. Despite their minuteness, however, these movements, glances, and sounds help to define the Cooperian world.

They comprise a level of sensibility which serves as an index to the worth of the inner man or woman. For a writer of Cooper's philosophical bent, the account of manners is never merely a sociological commentary. Perhaps, as Lionel Trilling has indicated, the area of manners is always multi-dimensional for the novelist: "The great novelists knew that manners indicate the largest intentions of men's souls as well as the smallest. . . . The novel, then, is a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the materials of its analysis being always manners as the indication of the direction of man's soul."⁴

In The American Novel and Its Tradition, Richard Chase makes a number of perceptive comments about Cooper as a novelist of manners. He falls short of the mark, however, in the following statement: "In characterizing his people he makes the mistake of reporting their etiquette instead of their manners and of judging their propriety instead of their morals."⁵ Cooper is never interested in

⁴Trilling, pp. 211-12.

⁵The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 46.

social behavior merely as etiquette and, what is more, he is always concerned with the ethical implications of what his characters do and say. Granted, the delicate touch is not Cooper's stylistic forte, but he can on occasion take even the most insignificant action--like the "movement of a foot"--and discover in its nuances a key to sensibility.

In cataloguing the beauties of Frances Wharton, the heroine of The Spy, Cooper declares that "once, and once only, as they moved toward the repast, did Lawton see a foot thrust itself from beneath the folds of a robe, and exhibit its little beauties encased in a slipper of blue silk" (p. 166). This discreet foot may strike the modern reader as a rather "precious" way of pointing up a heroine's modesty. Yet the description recalls a similar situation in Precaution. The morally myopic Lady Chatterton, determined that her eldest daughter will make use of all the feminine wiles at her disposal, instructs her daughter in the use of the foot and ankle as "social weapons." The attack is initially launched in a chess game between Catherine Chatterton and John Moseley, a potential victim. The manipulating mother withdraws to the sidelines to watch the results of her tutelage:

"Check to your king, Miss Chatterton," cried John early in the game--and the young lady thrust out her foot.

"Check to your king, Mr. Moseley," echoed the damsel, and John's eyes wandered from hand to foot and foot to hand.

"Check king and queen, sir."

"Checkmate."

"Did you speak?" said John. Looking up, he caught the eye of the dowager fixed on him in triumph. "Oh, ho!" said the young man internally, "Mother Chatterton, are you playing too?" and, coolly taking up his hat, he walked off, nor could they ever get him seated at the game again. (p. 62)

The execution may not rival Jane Austen, but the situation is worthy of Pope.

For Cooper, it is from this kind of domestic setting that manners emerge most obviously as a reflection of moral sensibility. The home, a teeming source of emotionalism to the sentimental novelists,⁶ provides in Cooper's fiction a rich moral topography. The major features of this ethical map are the behavior codes which demonstrate the impingement of manners upon character. These codes determine proper male and female roles, relationships between the sexes, parental responsibility, and family unity. The importance of careful adherence to a predetermined system of behavior is established unequivocally in Precaution, Cooper's first novel, published in 1820. Precaution is the only thoroughly domestic novel in the Cooper canon, but the relationship between manners and morals, so crucial to this story, continues to operate in every novel Cooper wrote for the next thirty years. What happens in the

⁶See Herbert Ross Brown, The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860 (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1940), pp. 281-322.

drawing room may be tangential to the "minor plot" in these novels, but it is never irrelevant to the "major plot," or moral aim of the story.

Perhaps one of the most unfortunate shortcomings of Cooper criticism is the dismissal of Precaution as a "pastiche exercise,"⁷ because of its "purely imitative nature."⁸ It is indicative of the critical fate of this novel that Leslie Fiedler refers to "Cooper's first book, Persuasion"⁹--the title of a Jane Austen novel, of course, but not a Cooper novel. One might almost forgive Fiedler this homonymic error, but the statements of Kay Seymour House about the novel are perhaps less excusable. In referring to the plot of the novel, Ms. House says: "Jane married the wrong man and is wretched; Emily is temporarily attracted to an unworthy suitor, but . . . eventually marries a proper Christian."¹⁰ Jane Moseley, of course, does not marry at all in the novel. There is, moreover, always only one man in Emily's life: George Denbigh. Although Mrs. Wilson and Emily briefly believe

⁷Charles Brady, "James Fenimore Cooper, 1789-1851: Myth-maker and Christian Romancer," American Classics Reconsidered, p. 76.

⁸Robert E. Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times (New York: Minton, Balch, and Company, 1931), p. 258.

⁹Love and Death in the American Novel, rev. ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 186.

¹⁰Cooper's Americans ([Columbus, Ohio]: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1965), p. 20.

him to be unworthy, he turns out to be Lord Pendennyss, "a proper Christian." These two facts as Cooper presents them are crucial to his portrayal of manners and morals.

Precaution deserves more responsible critical attention than any commentator has thus far paid it.¹¹ This novel contains the germ of nearly every major theme that was to concern Cooper for the next thirty years. Additionally, through its drawing room pass models for most of the significant character types who were to reappear in Cooper's next thirty novels: the genteel hero and heroine, the sentimental young girl, the English scoundrel, the wise governess, the remiss parent, the sincere Anglican minister, and the middle-class social climber.

Particularly germane to this study is the fact that Precaution provides the primary source for the examination of sensibility at the domestic level. Whatever may have been the impetus for the novel's inception, its subject--the need for parental precaution in preparing daughters for marriage--is central to Cooper's philosophy of manners and morals. The problem of matching the heroine with the

¹¹Lounsbury, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Houghten Mifflin Company, 1882), pp. 22-25, discusses the novel briefly, primarily to demonstrate that Cooper is as thoroughly Puritan as the Yankees he despises. Donald Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), pp. 24-25, traces the appearance-reality theme through Cooper's fiction; he sees the genesis of the theme in Precaution, but like Lounsbury's, his treatment is briefer than the novel deserves.

proper hero is the primary plot in this first novel, not a parallel narrative as it often becomes in subsequent novels. The love story in these later novels is no mere pandering to the sentimental reader. Cooper's maiden novel establishes once and for all the importance of using wisdom in the selection of a mate. It is true that these love stories follow a formula: the sensitive heroine begins by perceiving the worth of the hero; some incident or mistaken assumption temporarily eclipses the hero's character; a sudden revelation, often of the hero's true identity, corroborates the heroine's initial estimate of his worth; the wedding then occurs as a natural consequence. Yet the formulaic character of these romances does not detract from their importance. On the contrary, the very repetition underscores Cooper's belief in the validity of the "precaution" he advocates.

Marriage was never for James Fenimore Cooper merely a part of the romantic machinery of sentimental fiction. It was ever a serious business, not to be lightly considered or thoughtlessly exploited. Cooper's letters to his wife, forming the bulk of his correspondence, are filled with affection for "Dearest Sue" and with parental care and concern for their children. The seven years' sojourn abroad was undertaken as much to prepare the Cooper daughters for marriage both in manners and morals as to fulfill the "grand tour."

Cooper's letters reveal his concern about the marriage of his daughters. For one thing, Cooper was very sure that he did not wish his girls to marry outside America. This bias may have been the result of his loyalty to his native land--which never flagged even amid that country's most stringent criticism of him--or the result of the kind of distrust of the foreign male revealed in his portrayal of the English scoundrel. At any rate, Cooper not only admits that he refused the request of a Frenchman for his daughter's hand, but in a letter to Mrs. Peter Augustus Jay, who had evidently mentioned the rumors that his daughters were looking for husbands abroad, Cooper declares: "We can scarcely imagine a cause that would induce us to permit either of our girls to marry in Europe."¹³ Ironically, the very process of educating his daughters to be young women of sensibility severely limited their chances to marriage--they were "finished" beyond the reach of most of the American males they would meet at home. In fact, Susan Fenimore Cooper, who was refused to the Frenchman, never married.

Cooper's concern with marriage goes deeper than the nationality of the chosen mate. His novels do not end, like those of the purely romantic writer, with the

¹²The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper, ed. James Franklin Beard (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), II, 103.

wedding. In nearly every novel, the reader is furnished with documentation of the fact that the wedding is not only the culmination of a careful process, but also the beginning of a responsible repetition of that process in the offspring. Emily displays the same kind of Christian commitment as a matron that she exhibits as a maid. Her new husband, Lord Pendennyss, not only shares this commitment, but he also puts its principles into practice in his liberality as a landlord (Precaution, p. 412). Such Christian principle, Cooper demonstrates, is the only surviving constant in a world of changing fashions and human imperfections. At the end of The Spy, Harvey Birch can die in peace because he sees in Wharton Dunwoodie-- the noble, virtuous, fair-haired son of Frances Wharton and Peyton Dunwoodie--sufficient reward for his sacrifice. Elizabeth and Oliver Effingham watch in sorrow near the close of The Pioneers as Natty Bumppo leaves his home of forty years in search of the ever-receding, unsullied wilderness. What turns their eyes back to Templeton is their commitment to the progress of civilization through the preservation of the family.

Marriage is a beginning and not an end, Cooper demonstrates, but it is a beginning for which the discerning parent and child carefully prepare. That preparation requires first of all the recognition that "every union gives existence to a long line of immortal beings, whose

future welfare depends greatly on the force of early examples, or the strength of early impressions" (Precaution, p. 86). In Cooper's drawing room, the recognition of both the social and moral implications of marriage is always a reflection of moral sensibility. The English drawing room of Precaution provides a stage for the social vignettes which demonstrate how this sensibility works. In subsequent novels, these vignettes are transferred to the American parlor, which remains as significant a moral environment for Cooper as the forest and sea become.

One of the most crucial tests of sensibility is the capacity to distinguish between what Jane Nardin calls "conventional propriety" and "true propriety."¹³ The first refers to the mere forms of behavior, the latter to a morally acceptable code of conduct. Cooper's first and most thorough example of "conventional propriety," of manners without morals, is the English officer, Colonel Egerton, of Precaution. His is a suave, polished deportment, which readily distinguishes him from the vulgar Jarvises. He sits and stands as protocol demands; his compliments are pretty and appropriately timed; he even converses facilely about the ultra-romantic poets Jane Moseley admires (p. 36). From his well-stocked literary quiver, he plucks at will those "favorite beauties"

¹³Those Elegant Decorums: The Concept of Propriety in Jane Austen's Novels (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1973), p. 15.

designed to impress the sentimental female. His capacity for exploiting aestheticism adumbrates the character of Gilbert Osmond in James's Portrait of a Lady, although James develops the quality with more stylistic sophistication than Cooper ever attains.

Jane Moseley, the victim both of "imagination unchastened by judgment" (p. 82) and inadequate training by a weak mother, lacks the moral perceptiveness to detect Egerton's true nature. She is saved from marrying this gambler and would-be rapist only through the vigilance of Mrs. Wilson, Emily's mentor. Lacking moral stamina, Jane becomes, once Egerton is lost to her, a self-centered, unhappy woman who cannot accept the love of a good man even when he offers it (p. 283).

Jane's behavior is in direct contrast to Emily's. When Emily believes she has been deceived in Pendennys's character, she refuses his proposal quietly, without becoming an emotional burden on her family. Cooper attributes her control to the fact that she is directed by her "heart" rather than her "imagination" (p. 174). In Cooper's use of these terms, "heart" seems to be equivalent to sensibility, to an honest emotional response, while "imagination" suggests sentimentality, the kind of exaggerated reaction that Cooper abhorred in the sentimental novelists. This distinction is emphasized in a late novel, The Pathfinder (1840), when Cooper compliments Mabel Dunham's

positive response to her guides, Natty Bumppo and Jasper Western: "Mabel was a girl of heart rather than imagination" (p. 233).¹⁴

Emily Moseley, having been assigned to the thoroughly Christian care of Mrs. Wilson, exercises the moral discrimination that her sister lacks. Cooper emphasizes her exquisite sensibility by endowing her with a special delicacy of appearance, which "forms a picture in itself" (p. 138), and acts as a metaphor for noble character. Cooper later assigns this singular delicacy almost exclusively to the American female, but in the English Emily, it acts as one more symbol of her superiority.¹⁵ Emily very early rebuffs Egerton's interest in her because she sees almost immediately that he lacks "sincerity"

¹⁴Under the pseudonym of "Jane Morgan," Cooper wrote two short stories titled "Imagination" and "Heart" and published in 1823 as Tales for Fifteen (see Tales for Fifteen. Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1959, with Introduction by James F. Beard). "Imagination" shows how a young girl's romantic magnification of a suitor and his attentions results in sorrow. "Heart" portrays true sensibility, the honest, unexaggerated response of a young girl to the man she loves.

¹⁵It is interesting that Hawthorne makes a point of saying that his "dark ladies," who stand in such contrast to Cooper's heroines, lack this "delicacy of appearance." Hester Prynne is characterized by "a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace" which is now recognized as the indication of gentility. Of Zenobia in The Blithedale Romance, Hawthorne says that her features were "remarkably beautiful, even if some fastidious persons might pronounce them a little deficient in sortness and delicacy," The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: Random House, 1937), pp. 115, 447.

(p. 15) and that he exploits aestheticism, touting "taste" at the expense of principle (p. 39).

Not only does Emily's moral perception enable her to penetrate Egerton's drawing room façade, but it also directs her to recognize the true propriety in the manners of Lord Pendennyss. To the morally discriminating eye, Pendennyss is not only physically superior to others of his own class (p. 25), but he is ethically superior in his liberality and Christian charity. John Moseley, moved by the plight of an unfortunate family ("his hand shook, his eyes glistened," p. 105), generously gives them several guineas. Lord Pendennyss offers only a little money to the family, but he spends a great deal of time working at the rehabilitation of the erring father. When Emily and Mrs. Wilson accidentally learn what Pendennyss has done, Mrs. Wilson comments on the difference between John's sentimentality and Pendennyss' sensibility: ". . . the relief of misery . . . is only a relief to our own feelings; but Christian charity is a higher order of duty; it enters into every sensation of the heart; disposes us to judge as well as to act favorably to our fellow-creatures" (p. 112).

In addition, Pendennyss' appreciation of poetry, Emily discerns, is the result of a genuine identification with the poet's thoughts, not the "tasteless taste" that Egerton espouses (p. 113). Cooper describes Pendennyss'

sensitive reading of the poetry of Campbell: "His ideas were as pure, as chastened, and almost as vivid as those of the poet; and Emily listened to his periods with intense attention as they flowed from him in language as glowing as his ideas. The poem had been first read to her by her brother, and she was surprised to discover how she had overlooked its beauties on that occasion" (p. 113).

Emily recognizes that even the very quality of Pendennyss' voice--"soft, deep, melodious, and winning" (p. 68)--reflects his sensibility, differentiating him once again from Egerton, whose "false sentiments" are uttered with the "gloss of language" (p. 34). This concern with the quality of voice prompted Cooper to caution his own son, Paul, to improve his speaking voice, to correct his "quick utterance" which is "never dignified."¹⁶ Moreover, in The American Democrat, Cooper points to the relationship between sound and sense in "the utterance of a gentleman" which "ought to be deliberate and clear, without being measured." He goes on to say that the educated, accomplished man knows that "the highest quality of eloquence and all sublimity, is in the thought, rather than

¹⁶Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, ed. by his grandson, James Fenimore Cooper (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1922), II, 521.

in the words, though there must be an adaptation of one to the other."¹⁷

Lord Pendennyss is only the first of Cooper's heroes in whom the voice is not only the mark of a gentleman, but also the hallmark of sensibility. It is Oliver Edwards' "manly tones" as much as his knowledge of the Anglican liturgy that impresses Elizabeth Temple in The Pioneers (p. 129). In the voice of Harry Wilder of Red Rover, "there was something sweet and gentle and at the same time manly" (p. 113). Mrs. Wyllys and Gertrude Grayson are charmed as much by the gentility of Wilder's voice as by the nobility of his appearance. The paradigmatic voice is that of Edward Effingham in the Home novels. Effingham is conducting the funeral service for a sailor, fatally wounded by the Arabs: "At the first sound of his voice, a calm fell on the vessel as if the Spirit of God had alighted from the clouds, and a thrill passed through the frames of the listeners. . . . The voice, intonation, utterance, and manner of Mr. Effingham were eminently those of a gentleman; without pretension, quiet, simple, and mellow, while on the other hand, they were feeling, dignified, distinct, and measured" (Homeward Bound, p. 408). The very fact that it is Edward Effingham, rather than

¹⁷The American Democrat (1838; rpt. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), pp. 115-16. Subsequent references will be cited in the text as AD.

Captain Truck, who leads the religious service suggests that this gentility of voice is simply one more manifestation of Edward Effingham's gentility of spirit.

Even though Cooper felt that the women of America have "a less agreeable utterance than the men" (AD, pp. 110-11), several of his heroines have the same soft unprovincial voices that characterize the gentlemen and point invariably to the highest kind of sensibility. In her first speech of Lionel Lincoln, Cecil Dynevor's sensitive voice indicates that she, and not Agnes Danforth, is the heroine of the story. No one catches the distinction sooner than the hero: "The tones of an extremely soft and melodious voice, and a pronunciation quite as exact as if the speaker had acquired the sounds in the English court, and which was entirely free from the slight vernacular peculiarity which had offended his ear in the few words that fell from Agnes Danforth, certainly aided a native attraction of manner, which it seemed impossible for the young lady to cast entirely aside" (p. 33). In Wyandotté, Cooper remarks on Maud Meredith's "even, graceful utterance" and "faultless accuracy of pronunciation, equally removed from effort and provincialism" (p. 17). In Lionel Lincoln, written in 1825, Cooper can identify this sensitive voice with the English court, but by the time he came to write the post-European

Wyandotté (1843) he makes the "unprovincial utterance" the exclusive mark of the genteel, sensitive American female.

The problem, so basic to Precaution, of distinguishing true propriety from conventional propriety was of such consequence to Cooper that it is repeated as early as The Spy (1821) and as late as Satanstoe (1845). In The Spy, the drawing room and its inhabitants are the same as those of Precaution--except that now they are American instead of English. Frances and Sarah Wharton exhibit the delicacy "which distinguishes the sex in this country" (p. 6).¹⁸ It is the heroine Frances who boasts the fair "abundance of golden hair" (p. 19), which for Cooper, as well as for Hawthorne, identifies the pure in heart. For herself, Frances Wharton chooses the noble, handsome genteel hero, Peyton Dunwoodie. Moreover, she knows intuitively that the English Colonel Wellmere's suave exterior hides an unworthy heart (pp. 252-53). She is appalled that Jeanette Peyton, the watchful aunt patterned after Mrs. Wilson but deficient in her prototype's moral astuteness, sees in him "one who appears every way qualified to make any woman happy" (p. 253).¹⁹ Sarah Wharton, like Jane Moseley,

¹⁸In Cooper's later novels this distinctive appearance separates the American girl from her English counterpart--and extends to encompass moral superiority as well.

¹⁹Kay Seymour House, Cooper's Americans, p. 25, says that Sarah Wharton "ignores the advice offered by her aunt, Miss Peyton," and falls in love with Wellmere, while

lacks her sister's clarity of ethical vision. She is saved from marrying the would-be bigamist Wellmere only through the timely intervention of Harvey Birch. The sad result of Sarah's failure of sensibility is even more severe than Jane Moseley's: Sarah suffers a mental breakdown.

Wherever the well-mannered English scoundrel appears in Cooper's novels, his function is two-fold: his conventional propriety serves as a contrast to the hero's true propriety; and he provides a crucial test to the moral perception of the heroine.²⁰ The malignancy of the type is nowhere better illustrated than in a brief vignette of The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish: the leader of the British authorities, searching for the regicide among the family of Mark Heathcote, "leered even upon the modest and meek-eyed Ruth herself" (p. 85).

In the later novels, there is a subtle, but nevertheless discernible alteration in the character of the English officer. In The Deerslayer--the only novel in which the heroine fails that crucial test--Major Warley lacks the criminal intent which is evident in Egerton and Wellmere. He is still too worldly: his intentions toward Judith Hutter are strictly dishonorable (pp. 548-49), and he has no

Frances "elects to do just as her aunt directs." Miss Peyton raises no objections to Wellmere as a suitor; Frances, not her aunt, perceives Wellmere's true nature.

²⁰In the Wallingford novels, the English scoundrel is replaced by the "mannered" English girl, who provides the same kind of test for the hero, Miles Wallingford.

compassion for the sufferings of his men (p. 548). Still he is not an attempted rapist like Egerton nor an attempted bigamist like Wellmere.

By the time Cooper came to write Satanstoe in 1845, the English officer has lost much of his villainy. Although Bulstrode thinks of love as a card game in which a man should make the most of his strong suits--such as a serious wound or an impending battle--he sincerely cares for Anneke Mordaunt. His major misjudgment is his failure to recognize the moral sensibility of Cooper's heroine. After Cooper's return from Europe, the artificial Englishman gradually yields the prize for odiousness to the rapacious, cunning, and thoroughly insensitive American Yankee.

Even this insensitive Yankee has his genesis in Precaution in the coarse, vulgar Jarvises, who have recently rented the Deanery near the Moseleys. After Precaution, the Jarvises disappear from the novels until Cooper, having declared in A Letter to His Countrymen (1834) that he has put aside the fictional pen, resumes his novel writing with Homeward Bound (1838).²¹ In Home As Found, the Jarvises reappear under the same name and the same general

²¹A Letter to His Countrymen (New York: John Wiley, 1834), p. 98. Cooper published The Monikins in 1835, but this book is, strictly speaking, a satire--an anti-utopia--rather than a novel.

family construction. In subsequent novels, the type is subsumed in the coarse, mercenary Yankee: the Newcomes, Aaron Thousandacres, Ithuel Bolt.

All the repugnant characteristics are present, at least in rudimentary form, in the Jarvises of Precaution. They are loudly garrulous and meanly curious. The fact that they have no firsthand knowledge and only sketchy second-hand knowledge of a person never deters them from conversing freely about him (p. 23). In addition, they confuse genteel reserve with bad manners. When the Ives family is visited unexpectedly by a seriously ill relative, Dr. and Mrs. Ives discreetly withdraw to grieve in private. The Jarvises, consumed by curiosity and the desire to feed upon the grief of mere acquaintances, peevishly ascribe the withdrawal to a "lack of good breeding" (p. 26). The same kind of social and moral obtuseness underlies young Jarvis' challenging Lord Pendennyss to a duel; the "insult" consists of Emily's having danced with Pendennyss (by prior invitation) after refusing to dance with Jarvis. The moral sensibility of Pendennyss is evident in his refusal to duel; he believes that "there can be no necessity for an appeal to arms where the laws rule" and he is "averse to bloodshed" (p. 88).

One of the most damning faults of the Jarvises is their complete insensitivity in religious matters. Inhabitants of Dr. Ives's parish, they attend the Anglican

services of his church. Like their counterparts in Cooper's later fiction, they are out of place in any kind of formal religious observance. Kneeling, always a symbol to Cooper of Christian humility, is completely foreign to the Jarvises. Those characters in Cooper's fiction who have the highest claim to personal superiority because of birth, background, and education are consistently the most humble. Those who have the least claim to such distinctions are patently self-aggrandizing and crudely self-centered. While the Moseleys kneel reverently, the Jarvises busy themselves in testing the plumpness of their pew cushions (p. 30).

The Episcopal worship service acts in Cooper's novels as a metaphor for Christian sensibility. His sensitive heroes and heroines belong to the Episcopal church almost as a matter of course. For Oliver Edwards of The Pioneers, having grown up with the Episcopal liturgies is as natural as having grown up a gentleman (p. 129). In fact, Cooper demonstrates over and over his belief that the Anglican liturgies are to the Christian worship service what Shakespeare's sonnets are to English lyrics: the beau ideal of the genre. The ad-libbed prayers and the knee-slapping enthusiasm of the "democratic" descendants of the Jarvises come increasingly to represent for Cooper the malignant dangers of the leveling process. The antithesis of such emotional chaos is the aesthetically

arranged, tastefully prepared Anglican liturgies, which assume increasing importance to the post-European Cooper.

The paucity of moral sensibility is especially evident in the Jarvis girls, who have none of that drawing room decorum natural to the sensitive Cooper female. They bandy coquettish remarks with Colonel Egerton in a manner that makes Emily Moseley cringe. Their forwardness is crystallized in the scandalous haste with which the eldest Jarvis girl marries Colonel Egerton, who proposes to her after he realizes that the chance of a union with Jane Moseley no longer exists. The Jarvis sisters operate completely outside the inflexible code which governs Cooper's drawing room.

Jane Nardin makes the point that two major rules are important in Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility: "the prohibition on writing letters to a man to whom you are not formally engaged and the injunction that a love affair ought to be concealed as far as possible until it culminates in a proposal."²² All of Cooper's females in whom moral perceptiveness is properly operative adhere to these rules. In fact, the major stricture which evolves in novel after novel is even more specific than Jane Austen's: no genteel woman responds to a man who has not declared his love for

²²Those Elegant Decorums, p. 27.

her. Failure to adhere to this code of conduct is, in one way or another, always fatal in Cooper's world.

It is only after she is brought to her deathbed by a stray bullet that Isabella Singleton comprehends the enormity of that failure. She tells the "victor," Frances Wharton: "I have exhibited those feelings which you have been taught to repress. After this, can I wish to live? . . . Woman must be sought to be prized; her life is one of concealed emotions" (The Spy, p. 297).²³ The rigidity of the code is underscored even more emphatically by the fact that until this confession from Isabella, Frances Wharton automatically assumes that Dunwoodie has declared his love to Isabella. That a woman would be the aggressor is inconceivable to Cooper's heroine. Moreover, Dunwoodie allows Frances this mistaken assumption, even though it means the loss of the woman he loves, because a Cooper hero would never be so unchivalrous as to reveal that he has not declared his love to a woman who has declared hers for him. The incident may sound like a comedy of manners, but Cooper is deadly serious.

²³In reviewing The Spy, published in 1821, W. H. Gardiner calls Isabella the "least agreeable of all the disagreeable 'bundles of sensibilities' we ever remember to have met with in print--or out of it," North American Review, 15 (July 1822), 267. Gardiner is cleverly devastating in his criticism of Isabella's frequent "hand-clasping" and other excessive responses. Gardiner was reviewing the novel, of course, before Cooper's fairly extensive revisions, made in 1831 (see the article by Tremaine McDowell, cited in Chapter One).

Cooper makes clear just how serious he is when he has the traveling bachelor of Notions declare: "There is not a doubt that the tone of manners here [in America] requires the utmost seemliness of deportment; that suspicion may even become dangerous to a man and is almost always fatal to a woman, and that as access to the circles is effected with less difficulty than with us, so is the path of egress much more readily to be found."²⁴ Judith Hutter recoils in horror when she learns from letters that her mother made the advances toward marriage with Thomas Hutter (Deerslayer, p. 427). Judith, nevertheless, makes the same kind of advances toward Deerslayer. Her love is no doubt sincere and Natty finds her beauty appealing, but it is perhaps just as much her present forwardness as her past indiscretion that repels the decorous woodsman. In Cooper's world, there are only two destinies for such a woman: death, or the more ignominious fate to which Judith descends, the life of a fallen woman.

The Cooper heroine, always a woman of sensibility, is ever on guard against revealing her emotional attachment to a man before he has declared his love for her. Following a severe wound at Bunker's Hill, Lionel Lincoln suddenly recovers his senses after several months. His first glimpse of the face of Cecil Dynevor reveals her

²⁴Notions of the Americans, I, 158.

love for him. Her blush--a consistent symbol of sexual purity in Cooper's males and females--is immediate, even though she had earlier received a letter from Lionel revealing his love for her (p. 224). Maud Meredith's fear lest her love for Robert Willoughby be discovered prematurely stems as much from this same kind of decorum as from the fact that Robert is her foster brother--feelings which Cooper attributes to her sensibility and propriety (Wyandotté, p. 115). Grace Wallingford has been properly betrothed to Rupert Hardinge for several years when Rupert decides to disregard the vows. She becomes distraught, however, when Miles swears revenge for the insult. She pleads that he will not disgrace her by challenging Rupert: "You owe it to my sex, to the dreadful imputations that might otherwise rest on my name. . . . I could submit to any punishment; but surely, surely it is not a sin so unpardonable to be unable to command the affections, that I deserve to have my name, after I am dead, mixed up with rumors connected with such a quarrel" (Afloat and Ashore, p. 486). For the undisciplined passions of Isabella of The Spy, Cooper designed a "stray" bullet; for the uninhibited Ozema of Mercedes of Castile, it was a fever. For one so innocent and ethereal as Grace, only death from a broken heart will suffice to relieve her from the unbearable predicament of loving a man who no longer returns the sentiment.

That such a code of behavior is no mere sentimental technique is demonstrated outside Cooper's fiction. In the letter to Mrs. Peter Augustus Jay cited above, Cooper makes clear that his daughters live by the same code that governs his fictional heroines in the parlor: "As they have no wish to catch even an American husband, they are reserved in society. . . . When they meet gentlemen, who have the education and delicacy of their caste, I trust they are not squeamish, but it is not enough to make a gentleman that one has crossed ocean in a packet, or even returned."²⁵

It is significant that Cooper never seemed quite comfortable with the one novel in which he allowed his females much more freedom of behavior than Cooper women typically enjoy: The Water-Witch. Because no sensitive American girl would ever exercise this kind of freedom, Cooper makes Alida de Barberie, his heroine, half French. She has "the raven hair, the large, brilliant, coal-black eyes, in which wildness was singularly relieved by sweetness" (p. 26).²⁶ Her behavior, although never "loose," is not Cooper's usual drawing room decorum: male visitors

²⁵Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper, II, 104.

²⁶It is probably no accident that this description echoes the description of the indecorous Isabella Singleton in The Spy: "Her eye was large, full, black, piercing, and at times a little wild. Her hair was luxuriant, and as it was without the powder it was then the fashion to wear, it fell to raven blackness" (p. 155).

leap through her window unexpectedly at night; she writes letters, though fairly innocent ones, to young men; she spends several days on the Water-Witch with no chaperone. The fact that the debonair Seadrift turns out to be the lovely Eudora probably does not placate Cooper much more than it does one of Alida's suitors, Oloff Van Statts, who says of Alida's escapade: "I cannot say that I wish the successor of my mother to have seen so much of the world" (p. 225). In the end, romance triumphs when the author allows the Skimmer of the Seas to sweep the willing Eudora away into the sunset. Even the decorous Cooper could not finally consign the fairy-like Eudora to the stuffy Patroon of Kinderhook. Despite the unusual freedom of women in the novel, Alida de Barberie is finally awarded to the "proper" hero, Captain Ludlow.

Never again, however, did Cooper write quite so lighthearted a novel. Moreover, in the 1834 preface to The Water-Witch, he makes a statement that is perhaps more apology than explanation: ". . . this is probably the most imaginative book ever written by the author. Its fault is in blending too much of the real with the purely ideal" (p. iii).

There is never really a question of Eudora's purity, of course, even though she has spent several years on board the Water-Witch without a female companion. The

Skimmer is thoroughly incensed and insulted when Myndert Beverout, Eudora's newly-discovered father, assumes that she is a ruined woman. The smuggler indignantly declares that she could not be more pure if she had been his own sister (p. 436). The piratical Red Rover exhibits this same kind of unqualified chivalry toward Gertrude Grayson. When Wilder expresses concern about the possible danger to the heroine from Rover's rough-looking pirates, the Rover answers: "Before harm should come to that fair innocent, with this hand would I put the match into the magazine, and send her, all spotless as she is, to the place from which she seems to have fallen" (p. 312). No surer proof need be offered that the Cooper gentleman--even if he is a pirate--adheres strictly to that rigid code which governs the Cooper female: death is preferable to dishonor.

Cooper very early associated this kind of chivalry with the American male. The sensibility which enables the American female to conduct herself with dignity and reserve calls forth in the American male an answering sensibility.²⁷ Regardless of his social station, he acts with respect and protectiveness toward the American woman. In The Spy, Cooper declares that "the good treatment of their women

²⁷In Notions of the Americans, the traveling Englishman says that "an American female is apt to assume a chilling gravity at the slightest trespass on what she believes, and between ourselves, rightly believes, to be the dignity of her sex," I, 195.

is the surest evidence that a people can give of their civilization; and there is no nation which has more to boast of in this respect than America" (p. 368). In 1828 in Notions of the Americans, where Cooper is still dazzled by everything American, he has the traveling bachelor say, "To me, woman appears to be filling in America the very station for which she was designed by nature. In the lowest conditions of life she is treated with the tenderness and respect that is due to beings whom we believe to be the repositories of the better principles of our nature."²⁸ Thus when Cecil Dynevor, in search of her husband of a few hours, walks into the rebel camp and is apprehended, Cooper says she prepared herself to meet her captors "with the perfect confidence which an American woman seldom fails to feel in the mildness and reason of her countrymen" (Lionel Lincoln, p. 367).

One would logically expect that the development of woman as the "natural repository of the better principles of our nature" would find its genesis in careful training by a conscientious mother. It should be clear from the foregoing discussion of Cooper's novels, however, that there is a fascinating absence of mothers in Cooper's fiction, a situation which a modern psychoanalyst would no doubt find intriguing. In twenty-eight of Cooper's thirty-one novels,

²⁸Notions of the Americans, I, 105.

the heroine is motherless. In each of the three novels in which the mother of the heroine still lives, some obstacle prevents her from serving as a direct source of influence on the heroine's moral sensibilities. Mrs. Moseley of Precaution, as indicated above, completely relinquishes the training of Emily to another. In The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish, Ruth Heathcote's influence is rudely interrupted when her daughter is captured by Indians. In The Heidenmauer, Ulricke Frey's desire to help her daughter marry a suitable husband is constantly threatened by the mercenary selfishness and insensitivity of her own husband.

The sentimental novelists often eliminated the mother in order to portray the daughter as a persecuted innocent. Kay Seymour House feels that Cooper dispensed with the mother to insure the heroine a Jamesian freedom from maternal domination.²⁹ This freedom has serious ethical implications for the heroine: it provides a severe test of her moral sensibilities. Can she--faced with an insensitive mother, or no mother, or a less-than-perfect mother-surrogate, or a poor father--exercise her ethical discrimination to the point that she remains safely within the Cooper code of conduct?

²⁹Cooper's Americans, p. 24.

Mrs. Moseley, who blindly concurs in her daughter's sentimental deification of the false Egerton, fails in her role as a responsible parent. She believes that there are "certain indispensables" to a proper union: "There must be fitness in fortune, in condition, in education and manners; there must be no glaring evil, although she did not ask for positive good" (Precaution, p. 85). Equally deficient is Lady Chatterton of the same novel; she errs by so forcing her sensitive daughter Grace upon John Moseley that a marriage, which both young people desire, almost does not occur. Grace, unlike Jane Moseley and unlike her own sister Catherine, retains her feminine delicacy, despite her mother's moral obtuseness.

The motherless Sarah Wharton, under the tutelage of an aunt who lacks the discriminatory powers of Mrs. Wilson, fails in moral perception, while Frances, a product of the same environment and influences, rises above them. In the same novel, Isabella Singleton attributes her fatal forwardness to being born "under a burning sun" and having neither mother, nor "mild, plain-hearted, observing aunt": "Oh! how much she loses, who loses a female guardian to her youth" (p. 297). Judith Hutter, of course, could well echo Isabella's lament; the loss of her mother, stained as that mother's character may have been, evidently coincided with Warley's seduction of Judith.



Cooper's sensitive heroine is ever aware that her duty to her parent or parent-surrogate is second only to her duty to God. Once Mrs. Wilson decides that the available evidence throws a shadow over Denbigh's character, Emily Moseley does not hesitate to follow her aunt's directive and decline his offer of marriage (Precaution, p. 215). On two occasions, Cecelia Howard reminds Edward Griffith that her obedience to her uncle, whatever his political misconceptions, takes precedence over her emotional ties to Griffith (The Pilot, pp. 141, 350). Although Priscilla Lechmere has shown herself in many ways to be a malicious, conniving woman, her granddaughter Cecil Dynevor clearly recognizes where her duty lies. To Lionel Lincoln's proposal of marriage, she answers with dignity: "You forget, Major Lincoln, that I have one to consult, without whose approbation I can promise nothing" (p. 255). Mrs. Wyllys, who married without her father's knowledge, echoes a sentiment that pervades Cooper's drawing room: "Gertrude . . . there is no peace for our feeble sex but in submission; no happiness but in obedience" (Red Rover, p. 413).

One of the major threats to family stability is the failure of a parent, like Mrs. Wyllys, to fulfill in some particular the Cooper code of conduct between the sexes. Jay S. Paul says appropriately that in Cooper's fiction, "family is vitalized beyond the mere conventional

practices of Gothic and sentimental writers, who utilize the theme as frequently as he but derive from it automatic sympathy for a distressed heroine."³⁰ Cooper is concerned in his later fiction that the family, "a symbol of tradition and security," cannot stand against the leveling democrats.³¹ Donald Darnell demonstrates that the landowners such as the Littlepages--the men who establish these symbols of tradition and security--have a "moral rather than a material" commitment to the land.³² A threat to the family dynasty, whether by trespassers or anti-renters, is a threat to the moral foundations of society.

An equally perilous menace has its roots in the domestic scene: family dissolution or fragmentation resulting from a failure of moral sensibility on the part of a parent. The strength of the emotional tie that binds family members together is emphasized repeatedly in Cooper's fiction. In fact, this tie assumes a mysterious character in the novels: over and over, a kind of unexplained, intuitive sympathy springs up between total strangers who turn out to be members of the same family. This electric spark represents sensibility at a supersensory level.

³⁰"Home As Cherished: The Theme of Family in Fenimore Cooper," Studies in the Novel, 5 (Spring 1973), 49.

³¹Paul, 43.

³²"Cooper and Faulkner: Land, Legacy, and the Tragic Vision," South Atlantic Bulletin, 34 (1969), 4.

The strange bond first surfaces in Lionel Lincoln, whose mind, tinged with New England morbidity, provides a credible environment for extrasensory perception. Lionel feels an inexplicable bond with both the fanatic patriot Ralph and the patriotic half-wit Job Pray. The interest is certainly unaccountable on any rational grounds: while both Ralph and Job Pray seem to be without social standing, Lionel is a Major in the King's army and a member of the British Parliament. In Cooper's characters, however, intuition seldom errs: in an almost unbelievable maze of flashbacks, Cooper reveals that Ralph is Lionel's father and the idiot Job his half-brother. The same situation occurs in Red Rover, where both the Rover and Wilder are strangely moved by Mrs. Wyllys' voice and manner throughout the story. This mysterious response is perhaps not so incredible in Rover, who is her estranged brother, but in her son Wilder, separated from her soon after his birth, the reaction defies rational explanation.

The situation is repeated in three other novels. In The Headsman, the spark ignites between Grimaldi, the Doge of Genoa in disguise, and Maso and Sigismund, who turn out to be his sons. Myndert Beverout of The Water-Witch feels unexplainably drawn to Seadrift, the disguised smuggler, whom he discovers to be his daughter, Eudora. Finally, John Effingham, in Home As Found, is so taken by

Paul Blunt/Powis that he amends his will in Paul's favor, to learn later--by an intricate set of circumstances that only James Fenimore Cooper could create--that Paul Blunt/Powis is really Paul Blunt/Powis/Assheton/Effingham, son of John Effingham himself.³³

Collected in this manner, the examples of "extra-sensory sensibility" begin to assume the color of sentimental contrivance. The amount of coincidence alone is staggering. Yet what emerges from this heap of chance meetings and shattering revelations is something more than a mere fictional device. Each instance of family fragmentation cited above is the direct result of a moral lapse, a failure of sensibility on the part of a parent.

There are varying degrees of culpability in the offenders, but the failure is clear in each case. Lionel's father Ralph fathered the illegitimate Job Pray in an illicit affair with Abigail Pray. Consequently, when Abigail supported Priscilla Lechmere's malevolent lies against the honor of Lionel's mother, Ralph readily believed the charges. His own guilt, as well as the alleged misconduct of his wife, sent him to a madhouse

³³Actually, the situation occurs twice more in Cooper's fiction, though the incidents are less spectacular than those just cited. In Files Wallingford, Marble, Miles's mate, experiences a strong "pull" toward Mrs. Wetmore, who turns out to be his mother. In The Two Admirals, Admiral Bluewater is so impressed by the heroine, Mildred Dutton, that he leaves her a legacy in his will; soon afterward, he discovers that she is his niece.

and left Lionel fatherless. Myndert Beverout, whose marriage consisted only of satisfying "some vague forms of the colony" (The Water-Witch, p. 434), soon left a wife he did not have the courage to declare, unaware that he was leaving a daughter to be reared in a smuggling ship. Mrs. Wyllys of Red Rover, though less culpable, married without her father's knowledge and spent half a lifetime ignorant of the fact that she had a living son.

In The Headsman, Grimaldi forced marriage on a woman who loved another. Sigismund, the child of that union, was stolen by the woman's revengeful former lover (p. 407). Maso, the other son discovered by the Doge in the course of the story, is the illegitimate son of Grimaldi by a young girl he wronged (p. 443). The woman loved by both John and Edward Effingham chose to marry Edward. John was so embittered that he left home and assumed the name of his mother's family. Under this name, he married impetuously and, just as impetuously, left his new wife, discovering only a quarter of a century later that he left her pregnant with his son (Home As Found, p. 414).

In each instance both a man and a woman fail to act within the rigid code of conduct which circumscribes the relationship between the sexes in Cooper's world. The woman does not use sufficient care and evaluation in the selection of a mate; the man acts to exploit rather than to protect the weaker sex. Moreover, in each incident,

some family member--father, mother, aunt--fails to exercise the precaution which the morally perceptive parent never neglects. For the children who were the fruits of these indiscretions, someone had to assume the responsibility abdicated by the real parent. The failure of sensibility on the part of a parent is counterbalanced by the operation of sensibility in that person who fulfilled the parental role. In Red Rover, this role is shared by two unlikely candidates: the humble seaman, Dick Fid, and the Negro, Guinea. In The Water-Witch, Eudora's sensitive protector is the piratical Skimmer of the Seas, while Sigismund's in The Headsman is the family of the persecuted executioner.

In Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, Robert E. Spiller summarizes the interrelationship of manners and morals in Cooper's drawing room:

Cooper had learned while abroad to think of etiquette as the language of a national mind in dealing with moral and ethical problems. The unwritten laws by which men and women govern their actions in their relatively formal social life seemed to him the distinguishing features of a civilized society. His emphasis on form sometimes led him to lose sight of the purpose for which forms are adopted, but his realization that etiquette and ethics bear a word and meaning relationship to each other was sound.³⁴

Spiller's conclusion is valid, but his timetable is wrong. Cooper did not have to go abroad to learn that a man's social behavior is an index to his moral worth. The recognition that true propriety reveals the inner man is

³⁴ Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, p. 260.

the central subject of Cooper's first novel and informs the "major plot" of every novel thereafter.

Kay Seymour House declares that after Precaution, Cooper, "unable to construct a world of such delicate proportions that it could be shaken by a nuance . . . henceforth moved the occupants of his drawing room out of doors."³⁵ The fact is, however, that wherever a man and a woman meet in a Cooper novel, that spot--whether village square, wilderness clearing, ship's cabin, deserted island, or makeshift raft--becomes a moral-social amphitheater in which its inhabitants are bound by rules as stringent as those in any wainscoted parlor.

³⁵Cooper's Americans, p. 21.

CHAPTER III

IN THE LARGER WORLD: THE VILLAGE, THE FOREST, THE SEA

Although the drawing room continues to be the most ordered setting for manners and morals in Cooper's fiction, it does not, after Precaution, occupy the center of the narrative in any tale. Cooper's physical settings expand as his fictional themes diversify. The very diversity of these physical settings is no inconsequential achievement in itself. They include the drawing room, the village, the forest, the sea, the canals of Venice, a German abbey, a mid-Pacific reef, and the icy Antarctic. Such a command of geographical locations gives a novelist a stature which should go a long way toward compensating for a lack of stylistic sophistication. Variety, however, is not the only characteristic that Cooper's settings have to recommend them.

The setting in a Cooper novel is never merely an adjunct to the theme nor simply an adornment to the narrative. This is especially true of the physical landscape. As Joseph Conrad perceptively concludes, "For James Fenimore Cooper nature was not the framework, it was an essential part of existence."¹ The natural landscape

¹Notes on Life and Letters (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Conrad Company, 1923), p. 55.

assumed for Cooper the same kind of moral and religious significance it held for the artists of the Hudson River School. The grandeur of God working in the universe, says Howard Mumford Jones, was a fundamental tenet of this group of artists.² A deeply religious man, Cooper recognized as a basic component of moral sensibility a man's capacity to see himself as totally insignificant in contrast to the grandeur of God. The same humility that sends a man to his knees at the Episcopal altar strikes awe in him as he stands atop a promontory which affords panoramic proof of the glory and might of the Creator. The best people in Cooper's novels never fail to perceive this significance; the worst miss both the beauty and the morality of the landscape. For them, the land is flora and fauna, either to be classified or, more commonly, to be wantonly devastated. In the words of Donald Ringe, "the physical setting both defines the problem in, and sets the moral tone for, many of Cooper's tales."³

Obviously then, once Cooper moves out of the drawing room as the principal setting for his fiction, the arena in which the characters act becomes more complex and more intricate. The problems are still ethical, of course; but

²"Prose and Pictures: James Fenimore Cooper," Tulane Studies in English, 3 (1952), 143.

³James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), pp. 21-22.

they are no longer simply personal, domestic, and familial. They become communal, national, ethnic, racial, and metaphysical. The morally sensitive character can see beyond his personal needs and desires. His actions are directed not by legality, but rather by the exercise of his moral imagination: in his relationships with others, he goes beyond what is dictated by accepted social, legal-- sometimes even ethical--codes in order to achieve a greater good.

I

In the early novels, Cooper's characters encounter dilemmas in three major settings which test their moral worth: the village, the forest, and the sea. In the ideal village, or "settlement," various families are united, not merely geographically, but also socially--perhaps even politically as well. They have joined together for physical protection and for the purpose of imposing civilization upon the wilderness. In Edwin Cady's view, the village in its ideality represents for Cooper the "agrarian dream of a thriving country-side dotted with splendid yet democratic gentry to lead and serve the people as its most imaginative, energetic, and sincere spokesmen."⁴

⁴Edwin Cady, The Gentleman in America: A Literary Study in American Culture (New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1949), p. 103.

Given human nature as it exists, the ideal is seldom realized. The divisiveness of war may render the positive force of the village impotent as it does in The Spy and Lionel Lincoln. Or else, as in The Pioneers and The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish, village is still so indistinct from forest that the problem becomes one of defining rights and responsibilities.⁵ In such a transitional setting, the individual caught up in this attempt to impose civilization upon the wilderness has to come to terms with two problems: the stewardship of the land and the displacement of the Indian. Whatever the conflict, the individual's reaction to it is a measure of his moral sensibility.

In Cooper's second novel, The Spy (1821), the village setting is Westchester County, separated by a few feet of water from the island of New York, still under British influence in 1780. What was once a kind of agricultural Eden has become, because of its proximity to the contending armies, a barren, unproductive land. Cooper describes the sad effect: "It was useless for the husbandman to devote his time, and the labor of his hands,

⁵I am asking for some latitude in my use of the term "village." I include under it settlements of one or two stockades, new thriving communities, and established commercial centers such as Boston. My purpose is to distinguish a particular kind of settled community from the forest and the sea--those areas of action and possibility, to use R. W. B. Lewis' terms (The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955).

to obtain overflowing garner, that the first foraging party would empty. None tilled the earth with any other view than to provide the scanty means of subsistence. . . . The ground on which the action was fought had not a single inhabited building, besides the one belonging to the father of Harvey Birch" (p. 123).

Thus Westchester County, which has come to be known politically as the "neutral ground," is also physically neutral. This physical and political neutrality has distorted the village into a "moral wasteland."⁶ Its inhabitants, "either restrained by their attachments, or influenced by their fears affected a neutrality they did not feel" (p. 2). Anticipating the literally masked Venetians of The Bravo, these figuratively masked inhabitants, paralyzed by their own moral impotence, can no longer depend on the unity ordinarily inherent in the community. In such a political no-man's-land, even the conscientious person must sometimes travel incognito. The first chapter of The Spy brings together three men who conceal their identities and their loyalties. Mr. Harper is really

⁶ Donald Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 29. George Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1967), p. 33, says that in Scott the neutral ground "does not carry any suggestion of moral dubiety; on the contrary, 'neutral ground' is to be prized as the place where the differences are reconciled or temporarily forgotten, and where masquerade is unnecessary. To Scott, the phrase means 'common ground'; to Cooper, it means 'No-Man's Land.'"

George Washington; the traveler seeking shelter is Henry Wharton in disguise; the peddler is a spy for the American cause. In each of these men, concealment is necessary not for the perpetration of crime, but merely for survival in the moral chaos of the neutral ground.

Westchester County becomes, then, the testing field for the moral sensibility of the characters. Patriotism is the particular sentiment under examination, but Cooper's concern is more universal. It is true that the most positive manifestations of patriotism are in those persons loyal to the American cause, such as Peyton Dunwoodie and Harvey Birch; but Cooper also presents in Henry Wharton a sympathetic portrait of an American loyal to England. Thus while patriotism is the thematic vehicle in the novel, the "major plot" concerns the character's ability to enter into a firm, responsible moral commitment.

The validity of this commitment is determined by the degree to which a character's moral imagination is operative--that is, the degree to which he is able to subordinate his own desires to the general good. The most obviously irresponsible and totally uncommitted groups are the Cowboys and the Skinners. The Cowboys affect loyalty to the king, the Skinners to the cause of the Revolution. In truth, both groups are little more than wandering bands of marauders, profiting from the condition of the times by robbing, plundering, burning--and even

betraying their own comrades if the price is right. The Skinners invade the home of Harvey Birch, rob him, and ignore with "brutal insensibility" his pleas that he be allowed to receive the blessing of his dying father (pp. 131-32). Perhaps it is only poetic justice that the Cowboys later ride coolly away from having hanged the leader of the Skinners, apparently insensible to his cowardly, desperate cries of "Down with the Congress! . . . Hurrah for the king!" (p. 424).

While this kind of insensitivity and complete lack of moral commitment is the most flagrant in the novel, Mr. Wharton evinces an even more malignant failure of sensibility. He is not only the owner of "one of the largest estates in the colonies" (p. 15), but he has also enjoyed all of the advantages concomitant with birth, breeding, and education. In Cooper's view, he is obligated, as a fortunate member of the landed gentry, to assume a position of leadership in the village. Instead, Mr. Wharton belongs to that "more wary portion" of loyalists who remain in America out of a "prudent regard to their ample possessions" (p. 17).

Not only does Mr. Wharton fail to exercise the leadership for which his social station should have fitted him; but, in addition, he lacks the moral fiber to make a firm commitment of his political loyalties. He secretly transmits the whole of his money to British funds

while he remains in America to insure the safety of his large estate. Using the hazy neutrality of Westchester as a shield, he holds his loyalties in abeyance while he awaits the outcome of the strife. He exploits and perverts the sentiment of patriotism, which should, as Cooper declares in the fourth preface to The Spy, "elevate its subject above all the grosser motives of selfishness."

Mr. Wharton is, in effect, practicing in secret the same kind of malignant duplicity practiced by the Cowboys and Skinners on the field of battle. In doing so, he not only deprives a community of his leadership, but he also endangers the safety of his own family. Both the arrest of Henry Wharton as a spy and the burning of "The Locusts," the Whartons' summer home in Westchester County, could have been avoided if Mr. Wharton had not allowed his greed to drive him from the protection of the British troops in New York. Even his love for his children is qualified by his greed: when Peyton Dunwoodie, an officer in the American army, asks for Frances' hand in marriage, Cooper says that Mr. Wharton's consent is "as much extracted by the increasing necessity which existed for his obtaining republican support, as by any considerations for the happiness of his child" (p. 76).

In the genteel hero, Peyton Dunwoodie, on the other hand, the sentiment of patriotism is manifested as sincere loyalty to the American cause. Dunwoodie is a good officer,

"not less distinguished by coolness and judgment, than . . . by his dauntless intrepidity" (p. 81). When he finds his troops in disorder, attacked in the rear by the English, he quickly encourages his men and recalls them to duty, his words and presence acting "like magic." He leads them across the plain with "an impetuosity that nothing could withstand, and the field was instantly cleared of the enemy" (p. 93). Thus the voice, the presence, the sense of command that identify the gentleman in the drawing room distinguish Peyton as a leader on the field of battle.

It is both his duty as an officer and his patriotism which demand the exercise of Dunwoodie's moral imagination. As a friend and future brother of Henry Wharton, Dunwoodie works indefatigably to secure Washington's pardon for a crime of which he knows Henry to be innocent. Yet, as an officer of the American forces, Dunwoodie is able to transcend his personal desires in order to retain Henry in captivity and then to attempt his return after the British officer escapes. The dialogue on the subject between Dunwoodie and Frances may border on sentimentality (pp. 383-84), but as far as Cooper is concerned, the moral implications are clear. While the import of Dunwoodie's speech is "I could not love thee, dear, so much/ Loved I not honor more," it is his sense of duty and not his sense of romance that predominates. Even George Washington recognizes this facet of Dunwoodie's character. Working

indirectly to effect Henry's escape, Washington specifically orders Dunwoodie to abandon the search for Henry and turn to other duties.

The kind of unequivocal moral commitment displayed by Dunwoodie on the battlefield differentiates him from Mr. Wharton as a leader in the village. After the war he retires with Frances to his own plantation and to the continued responsibilities of imposing civilization on the wilderness. The appearance of Wharton Dunwoodie, a young American army officer, in the last chapter emphasizes that Peyton's leadership in the village will find a worthy inheritor in his noble, fair-haired son. In the hierarchy of patriots created by Cooper in The Spy, however, the apex is reserved not for the genteel hero, but for the untutored peddler, Harvey Birch.

Mr. Wharton, amply fitted by station and fortune for a position of leadership in the community, fails in moral sensibility. By contrast, Harvey Birch, poor and uneducated,⁷ demonstrates a sensibility that has Christ-like overtones. As a cunning Yankee peddler, his ostensible concern is personal profit; in reality, he has chosen not simply to subordinate his personal desires, but rather to obliterate them completely for the benefit of his country

⁷George Dekker, in arguing for Cooper's artistry in The Spy, points to the contrast between the homes of Harvey and Mr. Wharton, who is surrounded by luxury and fond relatives. After the Skinners burn his modest cabin, Harvey is not safe even in a tiny mountain hideout, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 31.

In order to give optimum service to the American cause, Birch assumes the identity which is, of all masks, the most odious to him: that of a British spy. Mr. Wharton, to whom Birch stands in most direct moral contrast, hides his corrupt intentions under an apparently righteous objectivity. The Spy conceals his virtuous intentions beneath a corrupt exterior.⁸

Such a modus operandi forces Harvey Birch into the role of a pharmakos, thereby investing his actions with a saintliness that is denied even the patriotism of Peyton Dunwoodie. Harvey's meek acceptance of his sacrificial role is symbolized in his act of exchanging clothes with one of the filthiest of the Skinner band (p. 131). The leader of the Skinners--who is after the Spy's blood and the fifty guineas he will receive for turning him in--is identified by Harvey as "the ancient Judas" who would "grow rich with the price of blood" (p. 184). Since the Americans will hang him at the first opportunity and the British will betray him at the promise of a few guineas, the threat of the gallows (cross) hangs over Harvey constantly (pp. 62, 116, 185, 359). He has, he tells Henry Wharton, been "hunted like a beast of the hills" (p. 360). While "God never forsakes his servants," (p. 360), the terrible isolation from his fellowmen deprives Birch even

⁸Ringe makes this point about the Spy, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 31.

of the little consolation their knowledge of his sacrifice might give him.

The same spiritual sensibility which qualifies Birch for the sacrificial role in the first place forbids his appealing to the one person on earth who can save him. Apprehended by Dunwoodie's men, Birch impulsively swallows the document from Washington which would reveal him as a spy for the Americans and save his life. He thereby refuses to exploit his relationship with the "father." Moreover, he will not render an "eye for an eye" by revealing to the American troops that he has a better title to the name of "patriot" than they. With this selfless act, Birch symbolically subsumes the law of retributive justice into the higher spiritual law of Christlike love.

The pharmakos, says Northrop Frye, "has to be killed to strengthen the others" by providing a means for them to shed their guilt.⁹ Both the Skinners and the Cowboys--their very names suggest that they are "beast hunters"--have in mind such a fate for Harvey Birch. The Spy does not die, however. In fact, he lives to receive the praises, if only in private, of his beloved Washington and to make the final grand gesture of refusing payment for his services by placing his foot in rejection upon the bag of gold which Washington offers him as compensation (p. 422).

⁹Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 148.

Donald Ringe suggests in his discussion of The Bravo--a novel in which the scapegoat is killed--that Cooper suffers a failure of nerve in allowing Harvey Birch to live.¹⁰ Two points contribute to a clearer understanding of Cooper's ending of the earlier novel. Symbolically, Harvey Birch does die: the loyal American patriot, who has sacrificed so much for the country he loves, "dies" with the close of the Revolutionary War and remains "dead" to all except George Washington, who declares to him, "Openly I cannot know you" (p. 421).¹¹ His resurrection as the "faithful and unrequited servant of his country" (p. 430) occurs only when a document signed by Washington is found on his body after his death. It is a final mark of Birch's moral sensibility that this paper lies in his pocket unrevealed, long after Washington is in his grave.

In the second place, Cooper's allowing Harvey to live enables the Spy to see the positive results of his sacrifice in the offspring of Peyton and Frances Dunwoodie. Birch meets Wharton Dunwoodie, a young American army officer, by chance thirty-three years after the close of the major events of the novel.¹² The encounter occurs near

¹⁰James Fenimore Cooper, p. 61

¹¹The Bravo, by contrast, is able to vindicate himself to several people before his death, including the priest, Don Camillo Montforte, and Gelsomina, his betrothed.

¹²One cannot, of course, know whether Cooper was being deliberately metaphorical in setting this time lapse

Niagara Falls during the War of 1812. Upon learning the young officer's identity, Harvey, amazed at Wharton's resemblance to his parents, exclaims, "'Tis like our native land--improving with time; God has blessed both" (p. 425). Soon after this recognition scene, the aged Birch falls in a skirmish against the British troops. Ironically, the spy who chose a life of ignominy so that he might serve his country, finally meets his death in active service to that country. In the Revolutionary War, Harvey could not fight openly beside Wharton's father; but in his final battle, he fights beside the son of that earlier soldier. It is fitting that Wharton Dunwoodie discovers on Harvey's body the document which reveals his unselfish love for his country. Such a final encounter between the two men, coincidental as it may appear, provides a thematic relationship between the "love plot" and the major narrative--the kind of conscious artistic intention which critics often deny Cooper.

In Lionel Lincoln, set in Boston on the eve of the Revolution, the village is once again beset by the ravages of war. Patriotism is the thematic concern of this novel, but as in The Spy, the situation is more complicated than simple nationalism. The filtering intelligence is that of

at thirty-three years, but this specific number does add the finishing touch to the portrait of Harvey as a Christ-figure. It is during this thirty-three year period that Harvey is most supremely sacrificial, his true nature more completely erased than at any other period in his life.

Lionel Lincoln, a Boston-born, English-educated young British officer who returns to his native Boston just before the Revolution begins. Lionel has the "air of ease and high fashion gleaming" (p. 4) which distinguish Cooper's genteel heroes in appearance, and he has their nobility and sense of high purpose as well. He returns to Boston armed with a goodly portion of that "natural allegiance" which Cooper praises in the fourth preface to The Spy. He brings in addition a natural sensibility which protects him against the inflexible, condescending attitude of most of his fellow officers, who look upon the Americans as politically recalcitrant, but militarily innocuous dependents to be quickly chastised and forgotten.

Although Lionel is never in danger of assuming this condescending approach toward his countrymen, he comes to the full exercise of his moral imagination only under the opposing tutorships of Captain Polwarth on the one hand and Ralph and Job Pray on the other. The colorful Polwarth represents the rational voice of two years' experience in America--indeed his is a kind of irrefutable logic that is violently borne out at Lexington. Early in the novel he tells Lionel with confidence: "No, no, Leo, their minute-men, and their long-tailed rabble, would hardly think of besieging four thousand British soldiers with a fleet to back them" (p. 51).

What happens in Lexington--the epitome of the Cooper village with its "small hamlet of houses . . . dimly seen through the morning haze, clustered around one of the humble, but decent temples so common in Massachusetts" (pp. 112-13)--would seem to bear out Polwarth's estimate of American military strength. In a person of Lionel's sensitive nature, the unprovoked attack by the British soldiers arouses only horror: "Great God! . . . what is it you do? Ye fire at unoffending men! Is there no law but force" (p. 114). Lionel is calling for the law of love and brotherhood, but Polwarth, whose concern at this point is only military strength, assures Lionel that "the colonists will never fight in retaliation, nor if they had the disposition, do they possess the means to maintain a war" (p. 122).¹³

Ralph and Job Pray stand in opposition to this voice of reason and even to the empirical evidence of the Battle of Lexington. Zealous patriots who devote their full energies to the American cause, they operate by intuition rather than reason. Lionel--who is Ralph's son, though

¹³While Polwarth misunderstands the strength of the American desire for liberty, he does make one of the most appealing gestures of the novel. When there is no fuel for a fire to cook a meal for the starving, ailing Job Pray, Polwarth unhesitatingly contributes his wooden leg for the purpose. Both Yvor Winters, In Defense of Reason (1938; rpt. Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1947), pp. 194-96, and George Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott, pp. 39-40, have recognized the combination of Falstaffian brashness and gentleness in the character of Polwarth.

ignorant of the fact--is constantly exposed to their enthusiastic support of the cause of liberty. The patriotism of the half-wit Job Pray takes the form of the "wise foolishness" of Lear's Fool; out of his babblings about the "liberty tree" comes the reminder to Lionel that liberty, chameleon-like, is vanquished in one guise only to spring up in another form (p. 75).

In Ralph, Lionel has a more formidable and more impressive tutor. Considering it a kind of blasphemy to "disregard the natural ties of country and kindred" (p. 80), Ralph works tirelessly to win Lionel to the American cause. He takes Lionel to a town meeting where the sanity and reason of the discussion lead the young British officer to declare that men who reason so calmly cannot be on the threshold of rebellion. The bright-eyed Ralph knows better and warns Lionel against being directed solely by empirical evidence: "Think you that the fire will burn less steadily, because what you call the fuel has been prepared by the seasoning of time?" (p. 80).

At Concord, Lionel Lincoln watches in horror as the insensitive British wreak havoc on the inhabitants. Completely ignoring the fact that it is freedom from corrupt and malignant domination that the Americans seek, the soldiers inflict this very kind of repression as they wantonly ravage the dwellings in search of provisions: "Every door was flung open, and no place was held sacred

from the rude scrutiny of the licentious soldiery" (p. 124). Anticipating the Venetian government in The Bravo, the British commit what is for Cooper an unpardonable lapse of moral sensibility: they ignore--even deny--noble and refined feelings in their fellow human beings.

Although Lionel as a British subject and a British officer tries to cheer the British troops, his real sympathies are with his American countrymen. Even in the faces of the wounded and dying, Lionel perceives the clear distinction: on the faces of the British soldiers, there is "abject fear," while the American "lay in his blood, regarding the passing detachment with a stern and indignant eye, that appeared to look far beyond his individual suffering" (p. 131). As a result of what he has seen, Lionel does not suffer much chagrin at the military come-uppance suffered by his English comrades at Concord. His pride in his countrymen is, Cooper says, "a sentiment that is honorable to our nature, and which never deserts any that do not become disloyal to its purest and noblest impulse" (p. 136).

Unfortunately, Lionel's exercise of his moral imagination takes him essentially nowhere in the novel. Once he has recovered from the wounds he receives at Bunker Hill, Lionel and his new wife return to England with the

British troops.¹⁴ His wavering view of his native Americans has been corrected and expanded; his feelings have progressed from abstract pride in his countrymen to sincere respect for their graphically documented love of freedom. During his dark night of the soul, he even aligns himself briefly with the rebel cause. Lionel has the background, the education, the wealth, and the moral sensibility to assume the leadership in the ravaged village of Boston--but Cooper peremptorily ships him out on the first boat to England.¹⁵ It is unfortunate that Cooper failed to turn Lionel's gradually refined patriotism into some logical, positive action at the close of the novel.¹⁶

¹⁴Critics have commented often on the failure of this novel. See Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, pp. 42-43; Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott, p. 41; and James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: William Sloan Associates, 1949), pp. 41-42. Cooper's original plan was that Lionel Lincoln would be the first in a series of thirteen historical novels, but after the book became his first failure, he abandoned this project and returned to Leatherstocking in The Last of the Mohicans. As Grossman notes, the purely historical scenes of the novel are highly successful; George Bancroft thought the account of Bunker Hill the best ever written, p. 40.

¹⁵The fates of Job Pray and Ralph are no more explicable than that of Lionel. The patriotic Job dies, not amid the raging battle for the liberty he loved, but from smallpox. Ralph, the zealous advocate of freedom, loves it, as Grossman says, a little too literally--he has escaped from a madhouse in England and is being pursued by his keeper, p. 42.

¹⁶In "Cooper's Lionel Lincoln: The Problem of Genre." American Transcendental Quarterly, 24 (Fall 1974), 28, Donald Ringe attributes the failure, in part at least, to Cooper's shift of the point of view from Lionel's consciousness to the minds of other characters in the latter part of the novel.

In The Pioneers, sensibility is demonstrated not through the vehicle of patriotism--the time is 1793--but rather through the proper understanding of the moral implications of the landscape. The village setting is Templeton, modeled after Cooperstown and caught at the transitional moment when the line between forest and settlement is still hazy. Templeton is not, as George Dekker suggests, a "neutral ground" like Westchester County in The Spy.¹⁷ Rather this settlement--and this novel--captures that moment in history when the wilderness is dying and civilization is "struggling to be born," when civilization is, in fact, "passing from the gristle into the bone." The book is about that transition--its exquisite sadness and its hopeful joy. Cooper creates a spokesman for the settlement and one for the wilderness, but he also creates a genteel hero in whom the best elements of both worlds converge.

In Home As Found (1838), which portrays Templeton contemporary with Cooper's day, the author differentiates the stages of society: the happy beginning stage when the gentleman, though obviously superior in manners, education, and character, is drawn into a kind of camaraderie with those of lower station because they are his fellow adventurers in the enterprise of settlement; the second stage, the

¹⁷James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott, p. 46.

least attractive period in which there are "struggles for place, the heart-burnings and jealousies of contending families, and the influence of mere money"; the third stage when "men and things come within the control of more general and regular laws" (pp. 162, 163, 164).

Obviously the only stage into which The Pioneers can fit is the first--and yet it does not quite fulfill Cooper's requirements for the beginning period. It is true that the gentlemanly Judge Temple shares a mug with one and all at The Bold Dragoon--an act that would be completely unthinkable to Edward Effingham of Home As Found. Nevertheless, Templeton is not in the Edenic stage that Cooper's description suggests, nor is it wholly the "sylvan life" an early review termed it.¹⁸

The very real problem in Templeton is a thoroughly moral one: the problem of stewardship. It is the physical abundance of the American wilderness which draws the settlers in the first place; yet these same settlers are endangering their own existence by their wanton wastefulness. Richard Jones, as deficient in foresight as he is in architectural taste, sees no reason to practice conservation where there is God's plenty in everything. When Marmaduke Temple suggests to Billy Kirby, the

¹⁸Unsigned review, Port Folio, 15 (March 1823), 230-48. Reprinted in Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage, ed. George Dekker and John P. McWilliams (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 69.

sugar-boiler, that he extract the sap of the maple from a smaller incision, the insensitive Kirby brags, "If there's any sin in chopping them [trees], I've a pretty heavy account to settle, for I've chopped over the best half of a thousand acres with my own hands, counting both Varmount and York States; and I hope to live to finish the hull, before I lay up my axe" (p. 232).

It is Marmaduke Temple's aim to protect such men against their own obtuseness. He is as generous with his leadership and his possessions in the village of Templeton as Mr. Wharton is chary with his in Westchester County. He is not only a gentleman; he is an Episcopal Christian gentleman, interested enough in the spiritual lives of Templeton's inhabitants to build a church and bring an Episcopal minister to the village. Concerned with the future existence as well as the present comfort of the villagers, he perceives the long-term effects of the wanton felling of sugar maple and pine, of the prodigal, pointless killing of bird and fish. When he is momentarily carried away in the undisciplined shooting of pigeons, he has the sensibility, under Natty's chastisement to regret his error. He has enough moral imagination to see that if he--a man who has dedicated himself to the common good--is not immune to trifling with the blessings of the land, then only external restraints can "protect

the source of this great mine of comfort and wealth from the extravagance of the people themselves" (p. 223).

Marmaduke Temple perceives the moral dimensions of the problem: man must be protected not only from other men but also from himself. Temple's acumen as a social leader directs him to the conclusion that "society cannot exist without wholesome restraints" (p. 396). His moral imagination leads him to put the welfare of the community before his personal wishes in the matter of Natty's shooting a deer out of season. The easy answer for Marmaduke would be to overlook an infraction of the hunting law in the man who has just rescued his daughter from a ferocious panther. Judge Temple understands, however, that his responsibility prohibits him from extending favor to a convicted criminal, "because he had saved the life of his child" (p. 396).

Natty Bumppo cannot comprehend the social and legal implications of the Judge's decision because his sensibility toward the landscape is almost supra-moral--is, in fact, metaphysical. In Natty's view, the rape of the land is not, as it is for Judge Temple, simply "man's inhumanity to man"; rather it is man's blasphemy against God. The wanton killing of pigeons is not merely an indication of man's carelessness; it is the mark of his arrogant pride. The man who uses God's bounty wisely is the man who has properly assessed his own humble position

in the universe. Natty sees the wasteful slaughter of pigeons and fish as an arrogant infringement on the rights of the lower creatures, and he even empathizes with the "harmless things . . . looking up with their eyes on me, as if they only wanted tongues to say their thoughts" (p. 253).

Leatherstocking performs two acts which symbolize the supra-social and supra-legal nature of his sensibility. He refuses to eat any of the surplus of pigeons and fish: he will not "touch one of the harmless things" (p. 253) or "eat of no man's wasty ways" (p. 272). For Natty, the hundreds of birds and fish lying unclaimed on the ground have been contaminated by the immorally destructive touch of man. In the second place, Natty opposes this destruction by shooting one pigeon and spearing one fish to fill his needs (pp. 252, 276). There is something clean and pure and even saintly in these two gestures. They are additionally sanctified by John Mohegan's one-word blessing, "Good."

D. H. Lawrence contends that Natty, though "self-effacing and self-forgetting," is "still a killer."¹⁹ He is right, of course, but Richard Chase has added the proper qualification to the typically cryptic Lawrence

¹⁹Studies in Classic American Literature (1923; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 68.

statement: "the all-important difference is that Natty kills only out of necessity; and he kills, as it were, without passion. His code does not allow him to plunder, exploit, or kill in hate. Thus a fundamental moral question in Cooper, and in American fiction generally, is one of piety; characters are judged according to whether they have reverence for life, especially for wild, innocent, untainted life."²⁰ In The Pioneers, only Natty and John Mohegan, because they are of the wilderness and not of the settlement, share this truly spiritual commitment to nature.

Because of this spiritual commitment, Natty Bumppo is, of all the inhabitants of Templeton, the least threat to its future survival. The residents of Templeton indulge in a saturnalia of pigeon-shooting and fish-catching; Natty Bumppo conservatively shoots one deer. They congratulate themselves on their skill and go home; Natty is arrested and sent to the stocks.²¹ Yet, for all the poignance of Leatherstocking's predicament, Cooper is not guilty of the ambivalence Henry Nash Smith attributes

²⁰American Novel and Its Tradition (New York: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 62-63.

²¹One of Cooper's most memorable illustrations of sensibility in the lower class occurs when Natty is placed in the stocks. Benjamin Pump, Marmaduke Temple's steward, out of sympathy with Leatherstocking, sits down beside him and insists that he be confined in the stocks with the old hunter (p. 388).

to him.²² Cooper astutely discerned both the necessity and the inevitability of the impingement of civilization upon the wilderness. At the same time that he mourned the passing of the one, he celebrated the advent of the other.

The person who combines the best of both the village and the forest is Oliver Edwards/Effingham. He shares Marmaduke Temple's sense of social responsibility, but he has something more. He possesses the kind of sensibility which not only enables him to see what Natty and John Mohegan have lost, but which also earns him the honorary name of "Young Eagle" from the Delawares. He alone of all the white characters in the novel feels both the rightness of Natty's opinion of the world and the exquisite sadness of old John Mohegan's last lament: "Where is the ice that covered the great spring? It is melted, and gone with the waters. John has lived till all his people have left him for the land of spirits; his time has come, and he is ready" (p. 418).²³

²²Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1950; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p. 67. Robert Zoellner, "Conceptual Ambivalence in Cooper's Leatherstocking," *AL*, 31 (January 1960), 397-420, addresses himself to this same subject. The epithets he applies to Natty -- "moral infantilism" and "permanent prematurity," pp. 400, 401--do not seem to me to be accurate estimates of the character Cooper has drawn.

²³George Dekker says that "racial relations in Templeton are not an immediate social problem, only a problem of conscience for those few with a long memory"

While it is true that the development of Oliver as a character leaves much to be desired, he is not merely, as Ringe declares, "a stock element" that "may be dismissed as a concession to the popular tastes of the times."²⁴ He combines the best of the settlement leadership with the sensitive appreciation of the Indian and the wilderness. In appearance and behavior, he is more obviously a gentleman than Marmaduke Temple, whose rough edges have not been smoothed by the kind of education and background which Oliver has enjoyed. His understanding of the past is closer to the philosophy of Natty and John Mohegan than Marmaduke Temple's is. Like Faulkner's Ike McCaslin, he can see behind his own father's claim to the land; he tells Judge Temple, whom he believes to have confiscated the Effingham property: "I should think, sir, that the appearance of Mohegan and the Leatherstocking, stalking through the country, impoverished and forlorn, would wither your sight" (p. 357).

At the close of the novel, Natty takes his leave of Oliver and Elizabeth, but not Judge Temple. Oliver has inherited the legacy of the land which even Mohegan

(James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott, pp. 78-79). It is not so much a long memory that characterizes this concern--though Natty at sixty-eight certainly has one--but rather an acute sensitivity to what the Indian was and is no more. The young Oliver can hardly have a long memory, but he does have the sensibility to feel for the Indian's plight.

²⁴James Fenimore Cooper, p. 33.

considers rightfully his. He has received a legacy also from Marmaduke Temple: his sensitive, perceptive daughter, who not only appreciates the beauty of the landscape (p. 28), but who feels that John Mohegan has a "natural right to order what he will from us" (p. 416). These two alone seem to perceive the sadness of Natty's being driven from the place that has been for forty years the "home and shelter of my head" (p. 369). Perhaps they are better leaders in the village because they understand the ironic necessity that sends Natty Bumppo in his flight from civilization to open "the way for the march of the nation across the continent" (p. 477).

In The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish (1829), Cooper again catches civilization in the act of being born, this time on the Connecticut frontier at the end of the seventeenth century. The problem of the displacement of the Indian, secondary in The Pioneers, is the central theme of The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish. Moreover, there is a dimension to this later novel that the earlier book lacks: the whites involved are the Heathcotes, a family of Puritans led by old Mark Heathcote, who adheres strictly to the Puritan practice of interpreting every facet of his life in relation to his religion. As Donald Ringe has perceived, however, this is not so much a book about Puritanism as it is a book about Christianity.²⁵ How the

²⁵James Fenimore Cooper, p. 51.

Christian responds to both the interrogation and the terrorization of the Indian is a measure of his moral sensibility.

Mark's family, comparable in their humility and sincerity to the first generation Puritans who settled in America, feel only compassion for the young Narragansett boy captured near their compound. They are unaware that he is Conanchet, out to revenge the death of his father, Miantonimoh, killed by the English and their Mohican allies. Conanchet arouses in Mark the "desire to quicken the seeds of spiritual regeneration," which, though dormant, "he believed to exist in the whole family of man" (p. 91). This refusal to adhere to strict Calvinistic doctrine is only one of several indices of old Mark's ethical sensibility.

Not only does he generously take Conanchet into the bosom of his family, but he rises Phoenix-like out of the "tomb"--the well in which the family seeks refuge when the Indians burn their home down around their heads--praising God for his mercy and refusing to curse the Indians: "I ask not vengeance on the deluded. . . . They have ignorantly done this evil. Let no man arm in behalf of the wrongs of one sinful and erring" (p. 196). Mark refuses to recognize any hand but the merciful and chastising hand of God, even though his granddaughter Ruth has been captured by the Indians.

Lest these avowals appear to be the mere mouthings of Puritan religiosity, Cooper has both Mark and Content Heathcote further declare that wrong has never been done the Indians in their valley (p. 309). Having paid the Indians fairly for their land, the Heathcotes have respected the boundaries of the Indian hunting ground. Echoing Matthew 25: 35-36, Mark demonstrates that he has exercised toward the Indian the compassion that Jesus demanded of the Christian: "What Indian hath asked for food, and not got it? If he has been athirst, the cider came at his wish: if he hath been acold, there was a seat by the hearth" (p. 309). Believing that whatever happens to him is a part of God's plan, Mark can accept defeat and captivity at the hands of the savages: "Out of evil shall come good, and from this triumph shall proceed an ever-lasting victory" (p. 305).

The sensibility of Mark and Content Heathcote is reflected in Content's wife, Ruth. Her kindness to the young Conanchet mitigates his savagery and engenders in him a responding sensitivity that has far-reaching consequences for the Heathcotes and himself. Even at the beginning of his captivity, his hatred changes to amity when he witnesses her motherly concern for her children. Ruth is so sure of Conanchet's nobility of feeling that she asks him to fill the office of "protector of her babes" in the Indian attack.

Conanchet takes this request so much to heart that, following the attack on the Heathcotes, he cares for the captured child, Ruth, and--believing the Heathcotes dead--eventually married her. As Dekker suggests, this is the ultimate protection that Conanchet can offer Ruth.²⁶ When he discovers that the Heathcotes still live, he magnanimously returns Ruth and their child to her family before his death. That Conanchet genuinely loves Ruth is clear in his parting speech to her: "He [Conanchet] will look for his woman and boy in the happy hunting-grounds, and they will come to him" (pp. 402-03). That she loves him is graphically demonstrated in the fact that, without him, she loses all will to live and quickly follows him in death. Grossman accuses Cooper of thus conveniently eliminating a mixed marriage,²⁷ and to a certain extent the accusation is fair. The deaths demonstrate, nevertheless, a poignant sensibility that transcends the problem of miscegenation.

Ironically, it is this same Ruth who, as a child, asks her mother why the Indians seek to do them harm. The elder Ruth seeks the answer first in her religious belief: "He that hath made the earth, hath given it for our uses, and reason would seem to teach that if portions of its surface are vacant, he that needeth truly, may

²⁶James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott, p. 79.

²⁷James Fenimore Cooper, p. 70.

occupy" (p. 154). For Mark and Content Heathcote, such an answer is all-sufficient; but Ruth has that special sympathy with the Indian's plight that Cooper's heroines often share with Natty Bumppo. She goes on to tell little Ruth: "I hope that what we enjoy, we enjoy rightfully. And yet, it seemeth that the savage is ready to deny our claims." The most telling mark of Ruth's sensibility is her reaction to the son of Conanchet and her own daughter. At first Ruth cannot bring herself to respond to the half-breed baby, but almost immediately her maternal nature revives and she shares her daughter's pride in Conanchet's son (p. 357).

Mark and Content Heathcote operate with the Christian sensibility of the first generation Puritans,²⁸ but the new voices that rise up by the middle of the novel speak in the hardened tones of spiritual pride. The Reverend Meek Wolfe exemplifies the kind of religious arrogance that is diametrically opposed to the Christian humility of the Heathcotes. His name, of course, perfectly epitomizes his ambivalent nature: ". . . in spirit, a rare combination of the humblest self-abasement and of

²⁸James Grossman's dismissal of the Heathcotes as Cooper's "mere self-conscious efforts to be 'fair,'" efforts which are "less effective than his cold hatred of Puritanism," p. 69, fails to take into account the many illustrations of the Heathcotes' Christian love and compassion. Cooper is seldom subtle in his attitudes toward his characters; if he disapproves of their philosophy or their behavior, the reader knows it in short order.

fierce spiritual denunciation. . . . an admixture of seeming charity with an exclusiveness of hope, an unweariness of exertion with a coolness of exterior, a disregard of self with the most complacent security, and an uncomplaining submission to temporal evils with the loftiest spiritual pretensions" (pp. 273, 274). Where Mark and Content are sympathetic and compassionate, Meek Wolfe is judgmental and retributive. From the pulpit, he upbraids Content for receiving a messenger on the Sabbath and questions him accusingly about the absence of his ailing wife from the worship service (pp. 275, 276). Even the text of his sermon reflects his Old Testament, "eye for an eye" bias: "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hands of Midian seven years" (p. 278).

It is Meek Wolfe who arouses the colonists against the Indians in the second attack. Despite Content's call for mercy to the Indians for their return of the "Wept" (young Ruth), the new settlers refuse to exhibit the Christian sensibility of their founder. The resolutions of the Council delivered to Content by the Messenger bear little resemblance to the Heathcotes' compassionate response to Conanchet years before. The first three resolutions are only a proscriptive prelude to the fourth: "to counteract the seeds of vengeance, by setting a labor-earning price on the heads of our enemies" (p. 262).

Content Heathcote's compassionate objection is so incomprehensible to the Messenger that he interprets it as no more than a dissatisfaction with the low bounty placed on each Indian head. When Meek Wolfe and the other settlers deliver Conanchet for execution to Uncas of the Mohicans--thus avoiding the responsibility for his death--Christian sensibility has indeed disappeared from the valley of Wish-ton-Wish.

II

In The Pioneers and The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish, the white man's confrontation with the Indian occurs in a setting already expropriated by the whites. In The Pioneers, this appropriation is advanced, and the displacement of the Indian is thorough. In The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish, Cooper catches the process at an earlier stage, but the environment is definitely that of the settlement, especially in the last half of the novel. In The Last of the Mohicans, however, the white man has invaded the forest not so much to settle as to wage war. The action of the novel occurs in what is primarily Indian territory, especially, as Donald Darnell has shown, in the last half of the novel.²⁹ In The Prairie, Cooper discovers the white man again in the process of invading rather than settling

²⁹"Uncas as Hero: The Ubi Sunt Formula in Last of the Mohicans," AL, 37 (1965), 261-62.

Indian territory, this time on the Great Plains. The invaders here are the Bush family, stern, selfish, and rapacious.

The Indians of these novels, to some extent still in control of their own destiny, are invested with a dignity and a presence denied to those Indians who are merely attempted reclaimers hovering on the fringes of white civilization. Moreover, the good Indians have the added role of protectors of the whites; Indian cunning and Indian skill become qualities to appreciate, not merely to fear. Consequently, in the forest, the measure of sensibility lies in the proper appreciation of the good Indian. The sensitive individual not only recognizes the Indian's nobility, but is willing to defer to his superiority on his home ground and to be guided by him. The Indian's expertise at interpreting his physical environment is the result of understanding his proper relationship to that environment. The perceptive white man never fails to take advantage of the lesson.

In The Last of the Mohicans, the good Indian whose nature and predicament provide the tutorship for the characters is Uncas, son of Chingachgook. Cooper's technique of posing and illuminating Uncas throughout the novel not only emphasizes his significance, but it also provides an opportunity for telling responses from the

whites.³⁰ Duncan Heyward, while he is not Cooper's most appealing genteel hero, does recognize the nobility of Uncas: "This, certainly, is a rare and brilliant instance of those natural qualities in which these peculiar people are said to excel" (p. 54). Moreover, Duncan is willing to admit his own insufficiency in the forest and to defer to the skill of Chingachgook and Natty, whose sincerity he intuitively recognizes (p. 45). When Hawkeye upbraids Uncas for overcharging his rifle, Duncan gracefully comes to the Indian's defense: "I cannot permit you to accuse Uncas of want of judgment or of skill . . . he saved my life in the coolest and readiest manner, and he has made a friend who never will require to be reminded of the debt he owes" (p. 80).

While Alice sees in Uncas only a protector, Cora's response is much deeper. From her first reaction to his physical beauty--"Who, that looks at this creature of nature, remembers the shade of his skin!"--it is clear that Cora's response is both emotional and physical. The empathy with which she meets his admiration may owe something to her "cross" of Negro blood, but Cooper is not nearly so interested in censuring Cora for her attraction to Uncas as he is in approving her choice of the noble Mohican over the evil Huron. It is the wicked Magua's proposal of marriage which Duncan calls the "horrid

³⁰Darrell, "Uncas as Hero," 260.

alternative," an alternative which Alice pronounces "worse than death" (p. 125). The deaths of Uncas and Cora obviate, of course, the question of miscegenation. Hawkeye's shake of the head at the Indian maidens' suggestion of a union between Uncas and Cora may be authorial comment, but the fact remains that this epithalamium-dirge is probably the most beautiful and moving scene in the novel (pp. 414-16).

Hawkeye, of course, is the one most sensitive not only to the nobility of the Delaware chief and his son, but also to their tragedy. He understands, as no other white person in the novel does, the exquisite sadness of Chingachgook's prophetic lament: "I am on the hill-top, and must go down into the valley; and when Uncas follows in my footsteps, there will no longer be any of the blood of the Sagamores, for my boy is the last of the Mohicans" (p. 29). What he learns from Chingachgook, Hawkeye tries to convey to the other whites. "You see before you a chief of the great Mohican Sagamore! Once his family could chase their deer over tracts of country wider than that which belongs to the Albany Patroon, without crossing brook or hill that was not their own; but what is left to their descendant!" (p. 147).

The eloquence with which Hawkeye always speaks of the Delaware's plight is repeated in his poetic descriptions of the natural landscape: he says of the waterfall,

"hereabouts it pitches into deep hollows that rumble and quake the 'arth, and thereaway it ripples and sings like a brook, fashioning whirlpools and gulleys in the old stone" (p. 57). It is no accident that his eloquence echoes that of the Indians, for to them he is indebted for much of his sensibility in relation to the landscape. John T. Frederick has shown that Cooper neither invented nor exaggerated the Indian metaphorical language.³¹ Because they respect the power and the beauty of the forest, their figurative language has its source in the natural world. The Indians never treat the wilderness with the arrogance and destructiveness of the white man. Natty not only absorbs this philosophy, but he makes it the basis of his religion.

Natty's religion, based on his early Moravian training, is the product of his intuition, not of his reason or of prescribed theology. Nowhere is Natty's spiritual sensibility more evident than in his dialogues with the Yankee psalm singer, David Gamut. While Cooper's portrait of Gamut is not the biting caricature which identifies the Yankees of the later novels, the singer's Puritanism provides a telling contrast to Natty's less proscriptive view of man's relationship to God. Gamut declares complacently: "He that is to be saved will be saved, and he that is predestined to be damned will be damned"

³¹"Cooper's Eloquent Indians," PMLA, 71 (1956), 1004-17.

(p. 134). When Natty calls this the "belief of knaves," Gamut, with typical Puritan narrowness, challenges him to cite "chapter and verse" for his disagreement.

Natty's "book," however, cannot be circumscribed by chapters and verses:

"'Tis open before your eyes . . . and he who owns it is not a niggard of its use. I have heard it said that there are men who read in books to convince themselves there is a God. I know not but man may so deform his works in the settlement, as to leave that which is so clear in the wilderness a matter of doubt among traders and priests. If any such there be, and he will follow me from sun to sun, through the windings of the forest, he shall see enough to teach him that he is a fool, and the greatest of his folly lies in striving to rise to the level of One he can never equal, be it in goodness, or be it in power." (p. 135)

David Gamut's punitive theology can appear as little better than a lifeless doctrine beside Natty's intuitive grasp of nature as the vital, living record of a bountiful God.

Natty Bumppo is still operating under this same intuitive religion in Cooper's next novel, The Prairie--except that the wilderness is now the treeless Great Plains and the hunter-woodsman-philosophe is the gaunt, octogenarian Trapper. Again, the measure of sensibility lies in the response to the landscape and the Indian. The rich foliage of the wilderness in The Pioneers and The Last of the Mohicans has given way to the almost bare waste of the Plains. This barrenness stands like God's judgment, according to Natty, on man's despoliation of the wilderness: "What will the Yankee choppers say, when they have cut their path from the eastern to the western waters, and

find that a hand, which can lay the 'arth bare at a blow, has been here and swept the country in very mockery of their wickedness?" (p. 83).

Again the contrast is between pride and humility. These qualities are graphically opposed in the opening descriptions of the Bushes and Natty Bumppo. Cooper begins the novel with a panoramic view of the Plains across which the arrogant Bushes march, completely unaware of how diminutive they appear against the immensity of the physical landscape. Their plodding progress is arrested only when Natty Bumppo suddenly appears upon a hill, illuminated in "a flood of fiery light": "The figure was colossal; the attitude musing and melancholy . . . imbedded, as it was, in the setting of garish light, it was impossible to distinguish its just proportions or true character" (p. 8). In the visual contrast between the physical reduction of the arrogant and the supernatural expansion of the humble, Cooper has made his moral statement. The rest of the novel is simply the demonstration of that statement.

The complete absence of sensibility is evident not only in the "coarse, extended, vacant" lineaments of Ishmael Bush's face (p. 5), but also in his incapacity "to mature any connected system of forethought, beyond that which related to the interests of the present moment" (p. 7). His stiff, unbending stride anticipates the robot-like gait of Abner Snopes in Faulkner's "Barn Burning."

His mindless journey cuts a wide swath even from the meager offerings of the prairie; desolation follows in his wake. The few social amenities he extends to the Trapper are offered grudgingly. The "law honesty" which prompts this lawless man to release Duncan and Inez Middleton is hardly sufficient to offset the unrelenting hardness with which he judges and passes sentence upon his own brother-in-law--guilty though Abiram White is. Bush exhibits a fierce exclusiveness toward what he considers his own property, lashing out at Natty's curiosity about the covered cart where the kidnapped Inez is hidden. When Natty would defend the Indian's claim to the land, however, Ishmael sneers at the Trapper's pro-Indian beliefs (p. 84). So far as Bush is concerned, there is no Everyman--only the red man and the white man, and Ishmael has no doubt where the superiority lies.

This same smug self-complacency is evident also in Dr. Obed Battius, the physical scientist traveling with the Bushes. Dr. Bat, who has none of Natty Bumppo's humility, so exalts man that he looks forward to the time when science will enable "reasoning, learned, scientific, triumphant man" to become equal to the great moving principle (p. 119). Moreover, the doctor's response to other human beings is never sensitive or sympathetic. For Dr. Bat, "knowing" a man, like knowing a plant or an animal, is equivalent to being able to classify him: "Ay, I

remember you well, young man. You are of the class, mammalia; order, primates; genus, homo; species, Kentucky" (p. 114). It is little wonder that his "battery of syllogisms" is utterly useless against the unscientific, intuitive Natty Bumppo.

The fraternal sympathy Natty had shared with Chingachgook is repeated as paternal admiration for the noble Pawnee, Hard-Heart. Seeing in Hard-Heart the courage and nobility he loved in Chingachgook and Uncas, Natty makes a formal request that the Pawnee be his son. The brave, with the deference and respect the Indians nearly always demonstrate toward Natty, accepts the offer as gracefully as it is made (p. 330). It is he who, with Duncan Middleton, supports Natty in his final moments, realizing perhaps that the fate of the red man is no less certain than the impending death of his adoptive father.

Natty Bumppo is fated, ironically, to lead civilization into the wilderness by his very attempt to escape from it. At the same time, he is doomed to be a frontier Cassandra, repeating unheeded his prophecies of the disastrous effects of man's profligacy. Most of the people Natty meets in the wilderness are incapable of absorbing his lesson in humility or his appreciation of the Indian's predicament. Neither Ishmael Bush, who would exploit the land for his own profit, nor Dr. Battius, who would

arrogantly classify the flora and fauna into subjection, understands Natty's message.

In fact, the only white man who demonstrates any real sensibility in relation to Natty is the genteel hero, Duncan Middleton.³² Although weakly developed as a character, Duncan is thematically strong because, like Oliver Effingham, he ties Natty to the positive aspects of civilization. He demonstrates that Natty's lesson has not always gone unheeded, that Duncan Heyward absorbed it and that Duncan Middleton has imbibed it from his grandfather. He says of the Natty his grandfather remembered: "Unlike most of those who live a border life, he united the better instead of the worst qualities of the two people. He was a man endowed with the choicest and perhaps the rarest gift of nature, that of distinguishing good from evil" (p. 130).

In addition to demonstrating Duncan's appreciation of Natty's nobility, Cooper also emphasizes his significance by naming him Duncan Uncas Middleton. The name invokes the noblest qualities of the Delaware tribe, and it recalls the Indian's tragic plight: his earthly immortality

³²Although Paul Hover, the bee hunter, is a more fully developed character than Duncan Middleton, he is more thoughtless than sensitive, willing to slaughter a herd of buffalo in order to enjoy the hump, the one delectable morsel that appeals to him. Natty's table manners are none of the best, but Paul eats with a kind of desperate greediness that suggests a failure in the self-discipline that characterizes Natty.

is confined to those few white man--like Duncan Uncas Middleton, his grandfather, and Natty Bumppo--who understand and remember his greatness. Finally, Duncan is the only white man present at Natty's death to hear the Trapper's confident, unhesitating answer to some silent roll call: "Here!" Like all of Cooper's genteel heroes, Duncan possesses the moral sensibility that will enable him to profit from the example of Natty's life.

III

If the forest is a proving ground where man's encounters with nature are revelatory of his moral sensibilities, the sea is no less so. It was Joseph Conrad who first suggested the significance of the sea as a moral landscape in Cooper's nautical tales: "In his sea tales the sea inter-penetrates with life; it is in a subtle way a factor in the problem of existence, and, for all its greatness, it is always in touch with the men, who, bound on errands of war or gain, traverse its immense solitudes."³³ Like the forest, the sea removes man from many of the everyday social concerns and legal authorities of the village. Consequently, he is often forced to use his intuition in evaluations and decisions which, in a more structured setting, are directed for him by external guides.

³³Notes on Life and Letters, p. 55.

The wilderness is a frontier that man may tame; the responsibility of those who would conquer it is to do so with the proper love and respect. Cooper does not require of Duncan Heyward and Duncan Middleton that they attain Natty Bumppo's skill in the forest, but he hopes that they will absorb something of the woodsman's sensitive understanding of the land and its first inhabitants. The sea, on the other hand, presents a frontier without the forest's possibilities for man's control. The task of the seaman is to develop enough skill to read the elusive, ever-changing, watery map and to navigate his own "world" upon its surface.

Duncan Heyward and Duncan Middleton can afford to remain passive in the forest as they defer to the superior knowledge of Natty Bumppo--indeed passivity is often a mark of wisdom in these genteel heroes. For Edward Griffith (The Pilot) and Harry Wilder (Red Rover), however, such passivity may be fatal, not only to themselves but to others as well. Both men know--or learn in the course of the narrative--how to defer to superior skill when necessary, but neither hesitates to assume, at the crucial moment, the command to which he has committed himself. Thus, while they are genteel enough to merit the love of Cooper's heroines, the added dimension of the sea gives them a "roundness" as characters that the technical heroes of the forest novels lack.³⁴ How they respond to their

³⁴The best critical treatment of Cooper's sea novels is Thomas Philbrick's James Fenimore Cooper and the

fellow men, their ships, their country--and the sea itself--measures their moral sensibility.

The seaman's association with his ship is one of the most formative influences on his character, and his response to the ship--to her beauty, her efficiency, even to her function as a microcosm--is almost always an indication of his sensibility. In a striking passage in The Red Rover, Cooper describes this emotional relationship between the seaman and his ship:

There is a high and exquisite taste, which the seaman attains in a study of a machine that all have united to commend, which may be likened to the sensibilities that the artist acquires, by close and long contemplation of the noblest monuments of antiquity. It teaches him to detect those imperfections which would escape a less instructed eye; and it heightens the pleasure with which a ship at sea is gazed at, by enabling the mind to keep even pace with the enjoyment of the senses. It is this powerful (and to a landsman incomprehensible) charm that forms the secret tie which binds the mariner so closely to his vessel, and which often leads him to prize her qualities as one would esteem the virtues of friend, and almost to be equally enamored of the fair proportions of his ship and of those of his mistress. (p. 442)

This description records the point of view of Wilder as he approaches the Dolphin, the Rover's ship, for the purpose of offering the Rover Captain Bignall's terms of surrender. The Rover identifies his own pride and personality with the Dolphin; like Natty Bumppo, who sets fire to his cabin in The Pioneers, the Rover puts the match to his ship rather than see it violated by the touch of an

alien hand (p. 461). In The Water-Witch, Tom Tiller is so closely associated with his almost supernatural ship that the epithet which is attached to Tom--"Skimmer of the Seas"--can apply equally well to his ship.

As early as The Pilot (1824), Cooper's first sea novel, this imaginative identification of the seaman with his ship is characteristic of the hero, Edward Griffith of the Alacrity, and Captain Barnstable of the Ariel. The prime example of such deep feeling for one's ship, however, is Long Tom Coffin of this same novel. He has the almost supernatural skill and the intuitive response to the sea which characterize Leatherstocking in the forest. His refusal to leave the sinking Ariel underscores this association: "I saw the first timber of the Ariel laid, and shall live just long enough to see it turn out of her bottom; after which I wish to live no longer. . . . These waves, to me, are what the land is to you; I was born on them, and I have always meant that they should be my grave" (pp. 292, 293-94).

The moral strength that his long association with the sea has given Tom Coffin is nowhere more evident than in the contrast between his death and that of Christopher Dillon. Dillon--hanging on the fringes of Colonel Howard's family, hoping to marry Cecilia Howard--is a sniveling simpering, cowardly man whose "loyalty . . .

was altogether of a calculating nature . . . intimately connected with what he considered his fealty to himself" (p. 182). He and Long Tom are the only persons who perish when the Ariel goes down. Moments before his death, Tom, composed and calm, quietly advises Dillon to put his trust in God. Dillon, in abject terror, screams, "I know no God! there is no God that knows me" (p. 294). At the moment of death, his countenance reflects such despair that Long Tom, inured to horrors, must cover his eyes (p. 295).

This scene in The Pilot is the first of several contrasts in which Cooper uses the manner of a man's death as a measure of his moral sensibility. The contrast is repeated in The Prairie in the dignified, Indian-like death of the religious Trapper and the horrible death of the murderer, Abiram White. The most graphic juxtaposition of antithetical deaths occurs in The Chainbearer when Mordaunt Littlepage witnesses the demises of both the malicious squatter, Aaron Thousandacres, and the poor but noble Chainbearer. Of the first, Mordaunt says, "'I caught one glimpse of that dark tenement in which the spirit of the murderer and squatter had so long dwelt. . . . I never before had looked upon so revolting a corpse; and never wish to see its equal again'" (p. 434). Of the Chainbearer's departure, on the other hand, Mordaunt declares, "'Of all the deaths I had then witnessed, this

was the most tranquil, and the best calculated to renew hopes of the Christian" (p. 437).

It is the response to life and not the response to death which serves most often as Cooper's measuring rod for his genteel heroes, whether on land or sea. Edward Griffith of The Pilot has the sensitivity to try to avoid needless bloodshed (p. 342) as well as the commanding authority and courage to inflict it when he cannot avoid it (p. 354). He has the same high sense of duty to his ship and his command which characterize Peyton Dunwoodie of The Spy. He sees, as Barnstable does not, that commanders of ships "must yield [their] own inclinations to the service of [their] country" (p. 81). Barnstable shares Griffith's loyalty to their ships, but he lacks the high gentility which enables Griffith to realize that a gentleman does not interfere with ladies except by request. Barnstable's plan is to kidnap Katherine and Cecilia if they will not leave Colonel Howard willingly (p. 351). Finally, Griffith has the moral imagination to defer to the superior knowledge and skill of the Pilot in critical moments. Although impetuous and proud, he generously sets an example of obedience for his men and gracefully compliments the Pilot's seemingly supernatural skill (p. 51).

The same kind of self-command and generosity is demonstrated by Harry Wilder in Red Rover. Cooper stresses his skill as a seaman, his authority as a captain, and his

courage as both. His valor is obvious in his willingness to attach himself, in the hope of serving his country, to the infamous Red Rover. His moral imagination is admirably demonstrated in his generous reappraisal of the Rover's character following their personal association, and his intercession with Captain Bignall on the Rover's behalf. Moreover, he has the sensibility to appreciate rather than to censure the Rover's refusal to "renounce an element [the sea] that has become as necessary to me as the one I breathe" (p. 425).

Captain Ludlow, genteel hero of The Water-Witch, although he is often unappealingly prim and proper, shares these same graceful qualities with Griffith and Wilder. He is a skillful seaman and a competent commander, but he does not hesitate to dispense with "all distinctions of rank and authority" in deference to the superior seamanship of the Skimmer of the Seas, when the situation requires a skill beyond Ludlow's capabilities.

The proper respect for skilled seamanship is not the only kind of allegiance which Cooper explores against the background of the sea. In all three of these early sea novels, patriotism not only emerges as a major theme, but it also acts once again as an indicator of moral sensibility. The genteel heroes exhibit the expected allegiance to the colonies or to England--depending on the setting and the situation. Cooper's most interesting investigation of the

theme of patriotism is through a gallery of unusual characters: Mr. Gray (the Pilot) and Colonel Howard in The Pilot; Captain Heidegger in The Red Rover; and Tom Tiller in The Water-Witch.

Colonel Howard, the staunch, unyielding Tory who has removed his niece and his ward to the coast of England during the Revolution, seems to have few redeeming qualities. Not only is he dogmatic and tyrannical, but he also blindly trusts the deceptive and cowardly Christopher Dillon, whose true nature is apparent to nearly everyone else in the novel. Despite Colonel Howard's faults, however, Cooper gives him all the best lines on the subject of rebellion. Although he is sometimes guilty of ranting and exaggerating, Colonel Howard's estimate of the dangers of rebellion anticipates Cooper's fears of the leveling principles of democracy: "Rebellion pollutes all that it touches, Madam. Although it often commences under the sanction of holy liberty, it ever terminates in despotism. The annals of the world, from the time of the Greeks and Romans down to the present day, abundantly prove it. There was that Julius Caesar--he was one of your people's men, and he ended a tyrant. Oliver Cromwell was another--a rebel, a demagogue, and a tyrant. The gradations, madam, are as inevitable as from childhood to youth, and from youth to age" (p. 130).

Moreover, when Barnstable and Griffith, who usually behave as gentlemen and friends, actually come to blows over the refusal of the ladies to leave Colonel Howard and accompany them, Howard's disapproval seems merited. A conscientious, generous uncle and guardian is being repaid for his efforts by the possibility of having his charges abducted and the prospect of watching two military officers fight like ruffians. The reader can hardly refuse to sympathize with his estimate of the situation: "Behold, my dear Cecilia, the natural consequences of this rebellion! It scatters discord in their ranks; and, by its damnable levelling principles, destroys all distinction of rank among themselves; even these rash boys know not where obedience is due!" (p. 355). Not even Howard's final submission on his deathbed--"it seemeth to be the will of God that this rebellion should triumph"--can completely erase the impact of his ominous forebodings for the future of American democracy.

Colonel Howard's position gets an added boost from the fact that the patriotism of the arch-rebel, the Pilot (John Paul Jones), is deficient in the kind of sensibility so evident in the selflessness of Harvey Birch in The Spy. Mr. Gray's skill as a Pilot arouses the admiration of the ablest seaman. His allegiance to the American cause is noble: the Americans have his loyalty, he says, "because you combat in behalf of human nature" (p. 216). There is a

shrillness, however, in his protestations which anticipates the insane ravings of Ralph of Lionel Lincoln: "How have I been cast upon the ocean, like some unworthy vessel that is commissioned to do a desperate deed, and then to bury itself in the ruin it has made!" (p. 153).

There is also an uncomfortable egotism in his Byronic declarations of his grand efforts in freedom's cause:

I might tell you that I am armed in the common cause of my fellow-subjects and countrymen; that though oceans divide us in distance, yet are we a people of the same blood, and children of the same parents, and that the hand which oppresses one inflicts an injury on the other. But I disdain all such narrow apologies. I was born on this orb, and I claim to be a citizen of it. A man with a soul not to be limited by arbitrary boundaries of tyrants and hirelings, but one who has the right as well as the inclination to grapple with oppression. . . . And view this cross! decorated as it is with jewels, the gift of the same illustrious hand; it is not apt to be given to the children of infamy. . . . O! the triumph over my fallen enemies has been tame to this heartfelt exultation which places me immeasurably above those false and craven hypocrites. (pp. 148-49, 153)

This kind of self-seeking justification is so far from the selfless humility of Harvey Birch that Cooper himself, according to his daughter, was unhappy in later years with the character he had drawn.³⁵

Given the character of the Pilot, it is little wonder that Cooper's extra-legal patriots in The Red Rover and The Water-Witch emerge as more attractive personalities than

³⁵Susan Fenimore Cooper, The Cooper Gallery; or, Pages and Pictures (New York: Miller Company, 1865), p. 77.

their earlier counterpart. Like him, they are maritime mavericks, but at the same time, they display a generosity toward their enemies and a magnanimity toward their charges which distinguish them from the self-centered Pilot. Both Captain Heidegger (the Rover) and Tom Tiller (the Skimmer) possess a sensitivity to beauty--whether in the outlines of a ship or the strains of a melody--which forms no part of the Pilot's personality. Obviously belonging to the "aristocracy of nature" (Water-Witch, p. 333), these rebels are as genteel as the genteel heroes and, at the same time, as multi-dimensional as Cooper's more interesting lower class characters. The Pilot, while he has the same complexity of character, lacks the gentility and sensitivity: for example, he exhibits little real feeling for his fiancée, Alice, using her primarily as a sounding-board for his self-aggrandizing orations.

Additionally, the patriotism of the Skimmer and the Rover is less colored by the desire for personal fame than that of the Pilot. Tiller, in The Water-Witch, is a smuggler because he believes that the colonies deserve a freedom of commerce that England denies them (p. 284). Captain Heidegger, whose motives are even purer, has turned pirate after having fought a duel with a fellow officer who insulted the colonies (p. 337). He flies the flag of the Red Rover while he conducts a symbolic journey in search of a flag for America. When the Revolution finally

arrives, he hides his infamous name and gives his life for the cause of the colonies. Like Harvey Birch, he willingly obliterates his true identity in order to serve a greater good.

In all three settings of these early novels--the village, the forest, and the sea--Cooper demonstrates that it was those individuals endowed with moral sensibility who made the greatest contributions to both the settlement of America and her bid for freedom. Cooper's faith rests primarily in those gentlemen whose superior backgrounds and educations have provided them not only with the capacity for leadership but also with a generous willingness to assume their responsibilities. At this stage in Cooper's life, however, he sees sensibility as a pervasively American quality. Consequently, he creates in these early novels several representatives of the lower class who, while they fall short of their social superiors in manners and refinement, equal them in moral sensibility. The supreme example of patriotism is Harvey Birch of The Spy; the beau ideal of the frontiersman is Natty Bumppo of the Leatherstocking Tales; the prototypical seaman is Long Tom Coffin of The Pilot. All three of these men serve as tutors for Cooper's genteel heroes. Despite their humble beginnings and their rough social edges, they exemplify the courage, the humility, and the selflessness which Cooper sees as

prerequisites of moral sensibility. It is the exhibition of these qualities which fits the well-born, well-to-do, well-educated genteel heroes for the aristocracy of worth-- and thus for positions of leadership in a democracy.

CHAPTER IV

COOPER, EUROPE, AND THE POWER OF SYMPATHY

Cooper's generally positive view of the American character and his belief that sensibility formed an integral part of that character at all social levels were well established by the time he decided to go abroad in 1826. It was, of course, inevitable that Cooper would be changed--psychologically, socially, and intellectually--by his experiences in England and on the European continent. Society was more stratified, manners more crucial, and tradition more revered in Europe than in America. Ever alert to his surroundings, whether physical, social, or political, Cooper observed and absorbed these distinctions. His major conviction about his own country, however, did not change significantly during his absence: American democracy is the most desirable form of government and provides the optimum environment for the nourishment of sensibility. This conviction emerges as a thoroughly documented thesis in Notions of the Americans and, by implication, in the European novels. Oddly enough, it receives its strongest emphasis in The Bravo, a novel written in Paris and set in Venice.

When Cooper sailed with his family for England on June 1, 1826, his fame was at its peak. He was, without a doubt, the lion of American literature. Precaution, while not generally popular, had prompted Cooper's friends to encourage him to continue writing. The success of his second novel, The Spy, was almost immediate. Early in 1822, the newspapers, as Thomas R. Lounsbury notes, were able to assert that the book had met with a sale unprecedented in the annals of American literature.¹ By March of 1822, a third issue was being printed and a dramatization of the novel was being successfully staged.

This success story was repeated in all the novels Cooper wrote prior to his embarkation for Europe, with the exception of Lionel Lincoln. The Pioneers, published in February, 1823, had sold 3500 copies by noon of the first day, a striking figure in those days. Cooper's fourth book, The Pilot, which introduced the novel of the sea to American literature, was instantly successful in both America and Europe. Moreover, The Last of the Mohicans was so popular that a stereotype edition was prepared within two months of the initial publication in February, 1826. Thus in a little more than a year after Sydney Smith's arrogantly British question appeared in the Edinburgh

¹James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1882), p. 34.

Review (January, 1820)--"In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?"--the novels of James Fenimore Cooper had begun to provide a respectable answer.

As a result of this literary success, Cooper was very much a part of the social and literary milieu of New York in the years just prior to his European trip. He dominated the group in "The Den," the back room of John Wiley's bookstore, where the American novelist mingled with such figures as Fitz-Green Halleck, the first of American poets at that time, and with the artists, Samuel F. B. Morse and William Dunlap. Moreover, Cooper was both the founder and the shining light of the "Bread and Cheese Lunch" (sometimes called the "Cooper Club").² This group included William Cullen Bryant, Gulian Crommelin Verplanck, the editor of Shakespeare; Halleck; Asher B. Durand, the engraver and artist; Morse; and John Wiley, the publisher. With these men, Cooper could share his appreciation for art and literature; at the same time he could move in a circle where refined manners and cultivated interests were uniformly practiced and admired. The bon voyage dinner given Cooper by the club on the eve of his departure was

²In a discourse presented at the Metropolitan Hall, New York, February 25, 1852, William Cullen Bryant declared that after Cooper went to Europe, "the club missed its founder, went into a decline, and not long afterwards, quietly expired," Discourse on the Life, Genius, and Writings of J. Fenimore Cooper, rpt. in Precaution (New York: D. Appleton Company, n. d.), pp. 5-40. See p. 16 for the quotation cited in this note.

attended by the major dignitaries of New York--including the governor, an Episcopal bishop, and General Winfield Scott. The toasts to Cooper were unanimously and singularly laudatory. Never again, Robert Spiller says, "did Cooper bask in such unshadowed public favor."³

Throughout the first half of his sojourn in England and on the Continent, Cooper was lionized as thoroughly abroad as he had been at home. He had received a commission as United States Consul at Lyons, a post that was requested and served primarily to forestall any accusations that Cooper was deserting his country.⁴ He made little use of the Consulship and still less of the twenty letters of introduction pressed on him by well-meaning friends.

Nor did he require any introduction into the best circles of London and Paris. His correspondence reveals early overtures from Lafayette, whom Cooper had met in New York, and the Russian Princess Galitzin (Corres., I, 100, 109-10). Cooper's real debut in Europe, however, was made in Paris at a diplomatic dinner given in honor of George Channing, Prime Minister of England, by the wife of the American Minister, James Brown. The Browns lived

³Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times (New York: Minton, Balch, and Company, 1931), p. 80.

⁴See the confirmation letter from Henry Clay, Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, ed. by his grandson, James Fenimore Cooper, I (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1922), 98. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited in the text as Corres.

well and richly in the Palais Bourbon, erected by a former Prince of Monaco. Cooper, obviously impressed with his surroundings and the occasion, details the affair in a letter to William Jay, November 12, 1826:

It was a great honor to be present, being one of the regular diplomatic entertainments, at which it is uncommon to find anyone lower in rank than a Chargé d'affaires. [Cooper was only a Consul] I attended and filled one of the end seats, as an extra attaché. The first thing will be to give you a list of the company. . . . To begin: M. de Ischann, Chargé d'affaires of Switzerland. Next, the Baron de Werther, Envoy and Minister of France. . . . [the list includes twenty-six names] . . . next, your humble servant. . . . The entertainment was exceedingly splendid and recherché--Turbot, salmon, Pheasants, and all those sorts of things beautifully served and well cooked. There were twelve footmen. I have been at several entertainments here, but none equal to this.⁵

A little later, Mrs. Cooper, in writing to her sister, indicates that the diplomatic dinner was only the beginning: "They make quite a Lion of him, and Princesses write to him, and he has invitations from Lords and Ladies. He has so many notes from the Princess Galitzin, that I should be absolutely jealous were it not that she is a Grandmother. We were at a Soirée there, the other evening, among Duchesses, Princesses, Countesses, etc., We saw Sir Walter Scott repeatedly while He was at Paris. He was with us several times, and treated Mr. Cooper like a Son or Younger Brother in the same vocation" (Corres., I, 111-12). In March of 1827, Mrs. Cooper writes to her sisters

⁵The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper, ed. James Franklin Beard, I (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), 159-60, 162. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited in the text as L & J.

again, describing another magnificent affair at the Browns'-- like her husband, she delights in enumerating titles (Corres., I, 122-24). She also mentions in a letter to her sister Martha that Pierre Jean David, the celebrated French sculptor, has sculptured a bust of Cooper--"an excellent likeness"--as a "testimony of his respect" for the American novelist (Corres., I, 147).

Nor did Cooper's associations with famous people stop with these contacts. In England, he lived next door to Samuel Rogers, the poet; in Florence he met Horatio Greenough with whom he began a life-long friendship and patronage. He met William Godwin; he visited Coleridge and attended social affairs at which the English poet was present.⁶

The Coopers found elegant surroundings not only in the social affairs they attended, but in their own domestic settings as well. For the summer of 1827, they rented a villa overlooking the Seine on the outskirts of Montmartre. Cooper describes the villa in his travel book entitled France:

The principal salon is in front. . . . The billiard-room communicates on one side, and the salle à manger on the other. . . . Up stairs, are suites of bedrooms and dressing-rooms. . . . There are also a carriage house, and stabling for three horses. The gardner and porter are paid by the proprietor. . . . M.

⁶See Earl Leslie Griggs, "James Fenimore Cooper on Coleridge," AL, 4 (January 1933), 389-91, for a brief discussion of Cooper's reaction to Coleridge.

Ternaux [the proprietor] enlivens the scene occasionally by a dinner; and he has politely granted us permission to walk in his grounds, which are extensive and well-laid out. . . . We have a neighbor on our left. . . who gives suppers in his garden, and concerts that are really worthy of the grand opera.⁷

There seems to have been no problem with money at this point. Cooper's writing was supporting him nicely, and the Coopers lived elegantly in Europe as the family of an American gentleman.⁸

All of this lionization, this social intercourse with lords, ladies, and ambassadors, this elegant living in elegant surroundings was bound to have its effect on Cooper. Even without his being aware of the process, Europeanization was changing Cooper, enlarging him. His own sensibilities were being sharpened by day to day contact with those social classes in which elegant manners and refined interests were taken for granted. At the same time such associations were diminishing Cooper's tolerance for the uniform mediocrity which he would find characteristic of American manners at the end of his European sojourn.

Cooper was not yet aware of this alteration in his own sensibilities nor of the changes that were enacting in America during his absence. He continued to defend his

⁷James Fenimore Cooper, Gleanings in Europe: France, ed. Robert E. Spiller (1837; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, American Branch, 1928), pp. 267, 268.

⁸In December, 1831, Cooper wrote to his sister-in-law, Caroline De Lancey: "I tell you in confidence, that I have the prospect of receiving this year near or quite twenty thousand dollars" (L & J, II, 159).

country against foreign attacks and to correct erroneous ideas about America. Notions of the Americans, Picked Up by a Traveling Bachelor, published in 1828, was his most industrious attempt to do both. Lafayette had asked Cooper to write an account of his triumphal American tour of 1824-25. While Cooper did not consider this tour a suitable subject for a book, he did come up with the idea of having a traveling bachelor--a refined, cultured European--visit America and record his impressions of the country, impressions gleaned from his own observations and the tutelage of a sensitive American, John Cadwallader.

The bachelor meets Lafayette in the course of his travels and records his own positive impressions of the Frenchman, along with the respect and admiration of the Americans toward him. The major portion of Notions of the Americans is given over to the celebration of nearly every facet of American life. The bachelor finds the American character intelligent (II, 94), devoted to truth (I, 153), and committed to justice (I, 239).⁹ In Congress, where both yeomen and gentlemen meet, the bachelor discovers that a "simple, quiet courtesy is the tone of manners . . . manly, independent, decent, respectful" (II, 34). The Americans speak their language better than any other nation speak theirs (II, 125-26); they treat the Indians fairly

⁹James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of the Americans, Picked Up by a Traveling Bachelor (1828; rpt. New York: Frederic Ungar Publishing Company, 1963). References will be cited in the text.

(II, 282-85); they respect the rights of property (II, 333). Moreover, the bachelor identifies an "Equality of condition," which brings the extremes of the community together and "elevates the less fortunate classes" (I, 100).

Cooper did not, of course, disregard the differences among men; he was certain that a "natural aristocracy" separates some men, both physically and mentally, from the great majority. In Notions, however, he believes that these men, "the repositories of the better principles," accept their responsibilities as leaders--moral as well as political leaders--and are accepted as such by the majority of their fellow democrats. The people choose the best among them as their political representatives; these representatives are improved by their contacts with the "natural aristocracy" and, in turn, exert a positive influence on those they represent. This general "elevation" is possible in a democracy because sensibility, the basic dignity and sympathy which Cooper sees in human beings as a group, is allowed full play.

Thus in Washington, where a kind of ideal of democratic decorum exists, the bachelor of Notions sees a reserved, but genuine camaraderie among representatives from all social levels. He is amazed at the unobtrusive mixing of the various classes when Mr. and Mrs. Monroe throw open their door "to all the world"; he is forced to agree when his friend Cadwallader tells him: "Your ears are not offended by improper discourse. Your individuality

is not wounded by impertinence, nor even your taste annoyed by any very striking coarseness of manner" (II, 59).

Notions of the Americans makes clear that Cooper still believed in 1828 that American democracy and the society it produces provide the most advantageous environment for the nourishment of positive manners and desirable morals. A republic properly conducted by sensitive, responsible representatives fosters a society in which leveling is upward and not downward. Cooper never denied that there is a natural superiority which--especially if nurtured by breeding and education--separates some men from the general population. In a democracy, however, where class lines are "soft," sensibility, a quality shared to some degree by all men, can act to bind together people of all social levels. Such a desirable unity is only rarely achieved, of course, in an Aristocracy and never in a Republic which has been corrupted into something else--for instance, a commercial Oligarchy.

These convictions form the basis of Cooper's European novels: The Bravo (1831), The Heidenmauer (1832), and The Headsman (1833). In The Heidenmauer and The Headsman, Cooper explores the way in which power vested in the church or an hereditary Aristocracy can be corrupted to the point that the ruling class acts completely from selfish interests, disregarding the sacredness of human feeling. The Bravo (which I shall discuss last because of its peculiar

relationship to Cooper's return to America) examines the failure and the exploitation of sensibility in Venice in the early eighteenth century.

The Heidenmauer is set in the village of Duerckheim, Germany, in the early sixteenth century during the time of the Protestant Reformation. The central subject is not, however, as Robert Spiller proclaims, "the effect of Lutheranism in liberating the mind of man from superstition."¹⁰

Cooper states his own theme for the novel:

However pure may be a social system, or a religion, in the commencement of its power, the possibility of an undisputed ascendancy lures all alike into excesses fatal to consistence, to justice, and to truth. . . . We gradually come to substitute inclination and interest for right, until the moral foundations of the mind are sapped by indulgence, and what was once regarded with the aversion that wrong excites in the innocent, gets to be not only familiar, but justifiable by expediency and use.¹¹

Cooper demonstrates this theme by showing how three powerful men--the worldly Abbot Bonifacius of Limburg, the power-hungry Count Emich of Leiningen, and the greedy Burgomaster Heinrich Frey of Duerckheim--exploit the highest of sentiments, religious feeling; for their own personal profit. The Abbot, whose high church office should carry with it a correspondingly high level of religious sensibility,

¹⁰Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, p. 220.

¹¹The Heidenmauer; or, The Benedictines: A Legend of the Rhine, p. 65. This and all subsequent references to Cooper's novels are to The Works of James Fenimore Cooper, Mohawk edition, 33 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

has like thousands of others "assumed the tonsure, the cowl, or the other symbols of ecclesiastical duty merely to enjoy the immunities and facilities the character conferred" (p. 65). These friars of Limburg, one character says, "eat the fattest venison, drink the warmest wine, and say the shortest prayers of any monks in Christendom!" (p. 6).

The Abbot exhibits none of the humility, asceticism, or self-effacement expected of one supposedly consecrated to the service of God and man. In one of the best-executed scenes of the novel, he engages in a drinking bout with Count Emich, designed as a means of settling feudal rights (Chapter VII). Another indication of Bonifacius' blunted sensibilities is the fact that he has no trouble understanding the self-fulfilling, wild fanaticism of one of his subordinates, Father Johan, since such feigned excitement is not very far removed from the kind of religious hypocrisy he himself practices. What puzzles the Abbot--what he cannot, in fact, comprehend at all--is the genuine religious sensibility of Father Arnolphe, who is grieved rather than disgusted at the depravity of the brotherhood, sorrowful rather than hostile at what he feels to be Luther's theological delusions, empathic rather than condescending at his parishioners' shortcomings.

Bonifacius' religious insensitivity is repeated in the Count and the Burgomaster. Emich is interested in destroying the political power of the Monks, while

Heimrich's motivation is escape from the feudal exactions of the Abbey. While their motives are wholly economic and selfish, the two men use the Protestant Reformation--a cause in which neither has any real interest--as an excuse to destroy the Abbey. When the Burgomaster cites the sinfulness of the priests as his ostensible excuse, his devout wife, Ulricke, instructs him in the character of true religious sensibility: "Arrayed against the Almighty, they [the sinful brotherhood] count as the leaves of your own forests, when fluttering in a gale--less than the flakes of snow that drive in winter . . . Limburg is reared in honor of God. . . . If there are unworthy ministers at its altars, there are those that are worthy; and, were it not so, the mission is too high to be sullied by any frailty of those who abuse their trusts" (p. 169).

The attack interrupts a mass being said for Odo von Ritterstein, who many years before committed a brief act of sacrilege, a minor infraction compared to the sacking of an abbey. As a result of this act, Odo lost all chance for happiness--he had been in love with Ulricke in his youth. He has devoted his entire life to penance for the rash act. In contrast, the Count and the Burgomaster, once they have accomplished the destruction of the Abbey, undertake a brief pilgrimage of propitiation to the Catholic shrine at Einsiedlen. Even this pilgrimage, however, is outward show rather than true religious sensibility:

Emich hires a "religious mercenary" to go along and do his praying for him.

Those characters who possess genuine sensibility suffer at the hands of the exploiters. The gentle, sensitive Ulricke must contend not only with her husband's religious hypocrisy, but also with his insensitive refusal to allow his daughter, Meta, to marry Berchthold, the man she loves. Heinrich's objection is not to Berchthold's sympathy with Luther; religious causes interest the Burgomaster only if they can be turned to a profit. His objection is the young man's poverty. The fact that Berchthold is a sensitive, intelligent man, who is poor as a result of misfortune rather than inferior social class, fails to move the Burgomaster. He approves of the marriage only after learning that Odo von Ritterstein has willed his titles and fortunes to Berchthold. Emich, always alert to the possibility of turning someone else's feeling to his own profit, promises--before Heinrich's change of heart--to arrange the marriage if Ulricke will use her influence to persuade the Burgomaster to join in the destruction of the Abbey. Her refusal attests to the fineness of her moral imagination: she recognizes that neither love for God nor love for human beings can be bartered.

In The Headsman, Cooper repeats the same general theme: an hereditary Aristocracy breeds evils at the top of society and misfortunes at the bottom. As in The Heidenmauer,

Cooper chooses sensibility as a vehicle for the demonstration of his theme. In the canton of Berne in Switzerland, the position of Headsman, the public executioner, is hereditary in the same way that the positions of Doge, baron, and bailiff are hereditary. While the privileged few at the top are happy with their fortunate positions, Balthasar, the Headsman, an outcast and a pariah, suffers a living Hell. Even those persons of his own social class, who should be most sympathetic to his predicament, react with mob violence. When he is recognized on a boat, the other passengers try to cast him overboard; when his daughter is inadvertently identified in the middle of her wedding as the daughter of the Headsman, she is jeered by the crowd and jilted by her betrothed.

For the most part, the Aristocracy turns a cold, unfeeling eye upon Balthasar's plight, although there is overwhelming evidence that the Headsman is a man of fine sensibilities, "a humble worshipper of God, and a believer in the blessed mediation of his holy Son" (p. 71). Balthasar even gives away his beloved son Sigismund so that the boy will not have to grow up to become an ignominious Headsman. Yet this "gentle, dove-like man," says his wife, "who would not willingly harm the meanest creature which has been fashioned by the will of God, is made to take life" (p. 380).

One member of the Aristocracy, Adelheid Willading, exhibits the sensibility lacking in the rest of her social class: she decides to marry Sigismund even though his profession as a soldier makes him her social inferior; when she learns that he will be the next Headsman of Berne, she has the moral imagination to perceive that Sigismund's worth as a human being is not diminished by a profession that is forced upon him against his will. As he had done in Lionel Lincoln, Cooper writes a complicated, improbable ending which partially negates both the force of Adelheid's sensibility and the force of the novel's theme: Sigismund turns out to be not the son of the Headsman but the son of the Doge of Genoa. Despite the flawed ending, the theme is obvious: Aristocracy as a form of government is destructive to moral sensibility at all levels of society.

In both of these novels, Cooper demonstrates the inevitable malignancies of a political structure which severs the lines of social and psychological communication among its members. Although his subjects, settings, and characters are European, his theme--by implication and contrast at least--is the celebration of American Republicanism as much as it is the criticism of European Aristocracy. In fact, Cooper himself declares, in A Letter to His Countrymen, that in the European novels, he was "determined to attempt a series of tales, in which American opinion

should be brought to bear on European facts."¹² He was convinced that the natural human sympathies common to all men can best be nurtured in a setting which insures an equality of rights--the kind of setting created by the American Republic. To demonstrate this conviction, Cooper portrays the moral failures of the church and the state in The Heidenmauer and of the Aristocracy in The Headsman; in The Bravo, he delineates the failure and exploitation of sensibility when a Republic is corrupted into a commercial Oligarchy.

Cooper himself identifies sensibility as the central theme of The Bravo in A Letter to His Countrymen:¹³

The main object of the work was to show the manner in which institutions that are professedly created to prevent violence and wrongs, become themselves, when perverted from their legitimate destination, the fearful instruments of injustices. . . . A pious son assumes the character of a Bravo, in the hope of obtaining the liberation of a father who had been falsely accused; and whilst the former is blasting his own character and hopes, under the delusion, and the latter is permitted to waste away his life in prison, forgotten,

¹²A Letter to His Countrymen (New York: John Wiley, 1834), p. 12. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text as Letter.

¹³Critical discussions of The Bravo have failed to take into account the centrality of sensibility in the novel. Interesting comments on the novel are made, however, by Donald Ringe in James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), pp. 58-62, and in the Introduction to The Bravo, ed. Donald A. Ringe (New Haven: College and Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 5-16; John P. McWilliams, Political Justice in a Republic: James Fenimore Cooper's America (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), pp. 154-66; George Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1967), pp. 127-34.

or only remembered as a means of working on the sensibilities of his child, the state itself, through agents whose feelings have become blunted by practice, is seen, forgetful of its solemn duties, intent alone on perpetuating its schemes of self-protection. . . . The object was to exhibit the self-styled republic setting at nought another of the holiest human affections. In the case of the Bravo, it trifled with the piety of the child; in that of Antonio, it was defeating parental care; and all at the expense of the many, for the particular advantage of the few. (Letter, p. 25)

In order to demonstrate the persistence of sensibility at all levels of society--and the unfortunate results when sensibility is either blunted or exploited--Cooper interweaves at least two subplots with the Jacopo story briefly summarized in the excerpt from Letter to His Countrymen. Antonio, a poor fisherman who has lost all his sons in the wars, pleads unsuccessfully for the release of his young grandson from service in the corrupting galleys. When Antonio's complaints arouse the populace, the Council of Three (secret ruling body of Venice) has him drowned, blames Jacopo--whose usefulness to the Council has expired at the death of his father--for the murder and executes him.

The second subplot involves Don Camillo Montforte, the Calabrian Duke of St. Agata, and Donna Violetta, the rich young ward of the State. Don Camillo has been five years in Venice petitioning the Senate for certain Venetian ranks and fortunes rightfully his. He falls in love with Donna Violetta and she with him, but the Senate is reserving Violetta for a marriage more economically propitious to

the State. Their secret marriage and subsequent escape from Venice is one of the few instances in the novel in which the machinations of the Senate are thwarted.

Cooper is convinced that sensibility is an inherent common denominator of human beings at all social levels. Signor Gradenigo, a member of the secret Council of Three, "was born with all the sympathies and natural kindness of other men, but accident, and an education which had received a strong bias from the institutions of the self-styled republic, had made him the creature of a conventional policy" (p. 81). Signor Soranzo, who is chosen to replace Gradenigo--the Council members are not safe even from one another--is a gentle, sympathetic man (p. 378). He is saddened, however, after his first session in the Council because he has taken "the first step toward the destruction of all those generous and noble sentiments which can only flourish apart from sophistry and fictions of selfishness" (p. 381).

Because the sensibilities of the Council members have been "blunted by practice," they either ignore or seek to manipulate the feelings of other people. The Council is charged with the protection of Donna Violetta, a rich Venetian heiress, who has been orphaned by the death of her father. The Council stands as parent-surrogate for Violetta and claims to feel toward her all the paternal affection and protectiveness of a true parent. Indeed,

Signor Gradenigo tells Jacopo, "The sparrow does not fall in Venice without the loss touching the parental feelings of the senate" (p. 71). The Council members' concern for Violetta, however, is directed completely by their desire to contract a marriage alliance for her which will further the interests of their own commercial Oligarchy.

When Violetta's gratitude to Don Camillo Montforte for saving her life and her sympathy for his mistreatment at the hands of the Senate ripen into love, the Council moves swiftly in its attempt to prevent a marriage which is not the most expedient for its own purposes. Violetta's governess, Donna Florinda, perceptively grasps the Council's insensitivity:

"They take no account of the solemn obligations of gratitude; the ties of affection are so many means of working upon the fears of those they rule, but none for forbearance. . . . Marriage to them is not a tie of sacred and dear affinity, but the means of increasing their riches and of sustaining their names They call marriages of affection children's games, and they deal with the wishes of their own daughters as they would traffic with their commodities of commerce." (p. 315)

This failure of sensibility on the part of the Council forces Violetta to flee from the place which should be a haven for her and from those whose affection for her should take precedence over all other interests. The fact that she finds this haven in a prison and this affection in a jailer's daughter supports Cooper's view that the potential for sensibility exists in all types of persons. Violetta and Florinda are at first surprised to discover in

Gelsomina, Jacopo's betrothed, such a sympathetic response to their plight, but they soon realize that her seclusion from the world has allowed her human affections to remain unsullied.

Yet another example of the Council's treating the "ties of affection" as "commodities of commerce" is the manipulation of Don Camillo's petition for the Venetian lands and titles. These lands and titles legally belong to Don Camillo, but even more important is the sentimental value they hold for him: since his ancestors were Venetians, his petition is as much a plea for the preservation of family ties as for legal claims. The Council, however, ignores both Don Camillo's rights and his feelings; they purposely hold in abeyance their decision about his suit so that they can profit from his powerful political connections. To effect their purpose, they callously and deliberately set out to manipulate his feelings. The oldest Council member tells Gradenigo: "Keep up thy communications [with Don Camillo], as of wont, and withhold not hope, which is a powerful exciter in minds that are not deadened by experience" (p. 175). Don Camillo and Violetta, however, are married secretly by Father Anselmo, Violetta's religious mentor, who feels both the injustice of the Council's attitude toward the lovers and the holiness of their affection. The pair escapes to the protection of Don Camillo's uncle, the Cardinal Secretary. The Council,

having lost one round, coolly regroups its forces for the next. The members vote to send letters of congratulations to the Cardinal Secretary "on the union of his nephew with so rich an heiress of our city"--just in case good relations with the Cardinal Secretary can be turned to profit at some future date (p. 378).

Thus Don Camillo and the Senators, whose backgrounds and responsibilities should serve to link them together, are irreparably separated by the Senators' failure of sensibility. On the other hand, it is Don Camillo's sensibility which precipitates his friendship with Jacopo, a member of the lower class, who has little in common with an aristocratic lord like Don Camillo--except human sympathy. In despair at the death of Antonio, Jacopo is on the verge of committing suicide in a spot where he feels the most kinship with the inhabitants--a cemetery reserved for those proscribed because they died outside the pale of the Church of Rome. Jacopo is interrupted by Don Camillo, who at first shuns a man whose reputation as a public assassin has made him a feared and hated outcast. He cannot believe that a man of Jacopo's profession and social class could experience feelings of any great magnitude. But when he sees the desperate grief which envelopes Jacopo, his sympathy gains supremacy and he agrees to listen to the Bravo's story of his father's unfair imprisonment and the Council's diabolical "deal" with Jacopo: if

Jacopo assumes the role of public assassin and private spy for the Council, he will be allowed to visit his father's cell while the Council arranges his release. As Jacopo has come to realize, the Council has no intention of fulfilling this latter promise. Don Camillo is so moved by Jacopo's account of his sufferings that he vows his friendship and his aid to the Bravo.

For Jacopo, the result of the encounter is much more crucial; by the Bravo's own admission, the Duke's sensibility saves his life; "'You have saved a soul from perdition, Signore,' he said, smothering his emotion. 'If the happy knew how much power belongs to a single word of kindness--a glance of feeling, when given to the despised, they would not look so coldly on the miserable'" (p. 239). In his gratitude and at his own peril, Jacopo helps Don Camillo and Violetta escape from Venice, joying in a happiness that he is destined never to experience. Called before the Council, Jacopo confesses his treason against the Senate. The Council, accustomed to act only from selfish interests, is incredulous:

"Fool! why didst thou this? Hadst thou no thought for thyself?"

"Eccellenza, but little; I thought more of finding a human bosom to pour out my sufferings to, than of your displeasure. I have not known so sweet a moment in years, as that in which I saw the lord of Sant' Agata fold his beautiful and weeping bride to his heart!" (p. 377)

The same kind of human sympathy which draws Jacopo and Don Camillo together forms a lasting bond between the Bravo and Antonio, the poor fisherman of the Lagunes. Just as the Council has kept Jacopo's father cruelly imprisoned so that they can exploit Jacopo's love for him, so they heartlessly consign Antonio's young and innocent grandson to the corrupting galleys. Untutored and unlettered as he is, Jacopo has no lack of moral imagination: he allows Antonio to win the regatta (the gondola race which is part of the celebration of the festival known as "the marriage of the Adriatic") because he knows that Antonio intends to ask for the release of his grandson in lieu of the gold oar and chain awarded as first prize. While the Doge praises the "justice" of Venice in allowing one so old and poor as Antonio to compete in the regatta and receive the prize, he turns a cold and insensitive eye upon Antonio's plea for the release of his grandson (p. 131). Jacopo, eligible for the second prize after he allows Antonio to win first place, feels so strongly for Antonio's sorrow that he risks his own safety and the longed-for freedom of his father: he asks that in lieu of his own prize Antonio's grandson be released. Needless to say, the Doge refuses Jacopo's request as coldly and angrily as he had the fisherman's.

Antonio continually reiterates Cooper's belief that sensibility is a force which has the capacity to bind men

to one another despite their social, economic, and political differences.¹⁴ "Feeling" is Antonio's name for this universal quality; he freely concedes its existence in the Doge and the Council members and he is completely bewildered when they ignore--even deny--its existence in him. Antonio's simple mind fails to grasp the true extent of the tragedy: "feeling" has become so blunted in these aristocrats that they cannot conceive that other men order their lives by it. Antonio declares to the Doge: "I am rude in my discourse, and little suited to this illustrious company. But, signore, God hath given to the fisherman the same feelings, and the same love for his offspring, as he has given to a prince" (p. 130). The Doge, like the members of the Council, has come to believe that all feeling is somehow related to the profit motive. At first he shows some interest in Antonio's grief, but when he hears the old man's plea for his grandson, he asks ironically, "Is this all? I had thought thy gondola in decay, or thy right to use the Lagunes in question!" (p. 131).

When Jacopo--again at the risk of calling down displeasure upon himself--takes Antonio to plead before the Council of Three, the old man reminds them "that even a fisherman of the Lagunes can feel as well as the doge on

¹⁴ Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott, calls Antonio the "real hero of the novel . . . a proletarian hero . . . the Leatherstocking of the Lagunes," p. 132.

his throne" (p. 161). In the case of Signor Gradenigo, to whom Antonio first presents his appeal privately, Cooper employs an effective symbol for this emotional link: mother's milk. Even though one is a poor fisherman and the other a rich and powerful senator, they are foster brothers who, Antonio reminds Gradenigo, "drew our milk from the same breast" (p. 62). Gradenigo, however, corrupts a bond of love into a bond of economic responsibility. At his offer of sequins, Antonio replies with dignity: "There are other wants than those of the body, Signore, and other sufferings besides hunger. . . . The senate is my master, and as such I honor it; but a fisherman has his feelings as well as the doge!" (p. 63). When Gradenigo remarks sneeringly that "feelings" seem to be the "engrossing concerns of life" to Antonio, the fisherman asks guilelessly, "Signore, are they not to me?" (p. 63). Even when Antonio reminds him of the sorrow they shared at the death of Gradenigo's daughter, the Senator is moved only briefly. When Antonio repeats his own suit, "all there [in Gradenigo's face] was cold, unanswering, and void of human sympathy. The soulless, practised, and specious reasoning of the state had long since deadened all feeling in the senator . . ." (p. 64).

This failure of sensibility in those whose background, wealth, and education has placed them in high positions of responsibility destroys the emotional link

that should bind man to man regardless of class. In addition, this refusal to respect the basic human dignity of all men sets an unfortunate--sometimes even tragic--example for those who are oppressed by an insensitive ruling power. When the oppressed collect into a mob--as they do in The Headsman and The Bravo--the sensitive understanding they may possess individually is lost in the emergence of mob violence, a phenomenon "dependent solely on animal force for its ascendancy" (p. 295).

In The Headsman the Bernese are victims of an oppressive hereditary caste system in which their superiors deny them human dignity and human feeling; as a consequence, they display the same kind of heartlessness toward the Headsman and his family. In The Bravo, Antonio demonstrates both courage and sensitivity in entering the regatta: he is an old man competing against younger and stronger men who are his social superiors; and, of all the competitors, he is "the one whose motive most hallowed his ambition" (p. 113). Yet, his fellow fishermen, safe in the anonymity of numbers, shower him with jibes and sneers--a vulgar version of the more sophisticated taunts he receives from the officials and the Doge. Cooper locates the blame for this mob behavior in insensitive, unfeeling leadership:

For the solution of this revolting trait of human character, we are not to look to Venice and her institutions, since it is known that none are so

arrogant, on occasions, as the ridden, and that the abject and insolent spirits are usually tenants of the same bosom. (pp. 113-14)

In many ways The Bravo is the culmination of Cooper's presentation of sensibility in the first half of his writing career. It is perhaps his only novel in which sensibility may be said to be both the central subject and the central theme. He studies the quality from every angle: its pervasiveness throughout the various levels of society; its effectiveness in binding those levels to one another; the dangers of its failure and its exploitation. He achieves the kind of integration of setting and theme which is typical of his best fiction. Early eighteenth century Venice with its traditional use of masks provides an ideal background for the examination of deception versus sincerity. Deception blunts sensibility because it requires a ratiocinative approach to people and events; sincerity nourishes sensibility because it presupposes an intuitive approach to life.

The Bravo, therefore, is Cooper's most thorough presentation of sensibility as an index to moral character. All of the good characters, whether lowly fisherman or lordly Aristocrat, are persons of sensibility; their lives are directed almost entirely by feeling and intuition; their responses are spontaneous, open, guileless. The villains are persons in whom sensibility has been thoroughly blunted; their actions are determined by

expediency, rationalization, and selfishness; their responses are rehearsed, contrived, vicious.

Finally, The Bravo, despite its European setting and characters, may well be one of Cooper's most American novels. In Notions of the Americans, Cooper presents the uncorrupted Republic of America through the eyes of a sensitive European, who sees the government as a benevolent force, dedicated to nurturing the finest sentiments in its citizens. In The Bravo, Cooper presents the corrupted republic of Venice through the eyes of a sensitive American--himself--who sees the government as a sinister force, committed to the exploitation and destruction of the holiest sentiments in its subjects. In both works, the result is a celebration of the Republic of the United States. Cooper, however, had been absent from his country for several years when he wrote both of these books. When he discovered, upon his return, that the America he had been celebrating no longer existed, the "shock of recognition" was so great that he never fully recovered.

CHAPTER V
COOPER'S RETURN TO AMERICA: THE
"SHOCK OF RECOGNITION"

Cooper's true "shock of recognition" did not occur until he stepped off the boat in New York in November of 1833. While he was still in Europe, however, there were rumblings which began to foretell the changes that would greet him on his return to America. Two factors--the alteration of his countrymen's feelings toward him and the changes wrought by Jacksonian democracy in the social and moral topography of America--were crucial in reshaping the treatment of the concept of sensibility in Cooper's later fiction.

By 1832, Cooper's honeymoon with America and Europe was just about over. The delayed reaction to The Bravo points very clearly to the fact that the blissful relationship was beginning to sour. Early reaction to the novel was positive: Figaro, a witty French journal "devoted to attacks on the juste milieu," praised the book at its publication.¹ The American public found enough of the romance of the early Cooper in the novel to make it interesting. Initial American reviews were favorable even to the American

¹James Fenimore Cooper, A Letter to His Countrymen (New York: John Wiley, 1834), p. 17. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text as Letter.

principles espoused by the author--or if they criticized the novel, they did so on purely literary grounds, the kind of criticism that never bothered Cooper very much.² On December 3, 1831, the New York American, a Whig newspaper, carried a short review, praising Cooper's efforts at making America understood abroad. Cooper, writing of this early reception in A Letter to His Countrymen several years later, declared: "I do not know that its author had any great reason to be dissatisfied with its reception" (Letter, p. 16).

In 1832 this positive reception of The Bravo changed. The pivotal review in this alteration appeared on June 7, 1832, in the New York American which, only six months before, had praised Cooper's novel. The June 7 review, signed by "Cassio," accuses Cooper of being "written out" and contends that The Bravo is totally without plot, coherence, or originality. Most significantly, "Cassio" feigns a complete inability to locate any purpose in the novel--thus deliberately setting at naught Cooper's celebration of American principles in the work. At the same time, Figaro, when it was bought up by the government in France, began to assail the author whose novel it had so recently and warmly extolled (Letter, p. 20). Cooper was convinced that "Cassio" was really an organ for the

²See Dorothy Waples, The Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Yale Univ. Press, 1938), pp. 86ff., for a summary of the American reception of the novel.

French Doctrinaires, an elite intellectual group opposed to political majorities.³ Cooper also believed that Figaro turned against him when the magazine was no longer controlled by the voice of the Opposition--the party led by Lafayette which sympathized with republican principles and disagreed with Louis Philippe's reactionary tendencies. The entire critical metamorphosis, Cooper believed, was the result of his part in the French Finance Controversy.⁴

Because he considered himself a spokesman for and defender of America abroad, Cooper felt obliged to agree to Lafayette's request in 1831 that he answer a letter printed in Revue Britannique and written by its editor, Emile Saulnier. In the letter, Saulnier contends that "the american [sic] Government is more expensive than that of France."⁵ Robert Spiller feels that Saulnier was not really interested in a financial comparison as such,

³"Cassio" was actually Edward Sherman Gould, "a writer of some local renown whose pen was dipped in the journalistic gall so prevalent in the period," Robert E. Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times (New York: Minton, Balch, and Company, 1931), p. 233.

⁴A meticulous retelling of this whole controversy occupies a substantial portion of A Letter to His Countrymen.

⁵Correspondence of James Fenimore-Cooper, ed. by his grandson, James Fenimore Cooper, I (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1922), 245. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited in the text as Corres. Lafayette had, of course, often asserted just the contrary: that the American government was less expensive than that of France.

but wished rather to "draw a conclusion favorable to a monarchical France."⁶

Cooper, though reluctant to enter into a foreign political debate, felt that as an American he owed Lafayette the courtesy of helping to vindicate both the Frenchman and the country that Frenchman had served. In The Letter to Lafayette, translated and presented to the Chamber of Deputies by Lafayette in January of 1832, Cooper restricts himself to a discussion of the American government, presenting his points logically and lucidly. He demonstrates that Saulnier misrepresents the facts by misusing figures: in some instances the French editor includes statistics that do not apply and in other instances, he makes assets appear as liabilities.

Here no doubt the matter would have ended but for two circumstances. Saulnier printed in the Revue Britanique a letter from Levitt Harris, attaché of the American legation, supporting the French allegations about the cost of the American government. Cooper, appalled that an American should not only fail to support a fellow American in the defense of his country but would even misrepresent

⁶"Fenimore Cooper and Lafayette: The Finance Controversy of 1831-32," AL, 3 (March 1931), 28-44.

⁷See the Letter to General Lafayette by James F. Cooper and Related Correspondence on the Finance Controversy, ed. Robert E. Spiller (New York: Columbia Univ. Press for the Facsimile Text Society, 1932). This publication contains both the Paulin edition (in French) and the Baudry edition (in English).

that country, replied in a series of letters in the National, the voice of the Opposition in France. For Cooper, the crowning blow came when President Jackson named Leavitt Harris, who had stepped forward as an opponent of Cooper and as an advocate of monarchical government, the Chargé d'affaires of the American ministry at Paris.

Nor was this all. The French Premier announced that William Cabell Rives, the American Minister to France, agreed with the French government that the American system was the more expensive. The contention was not corroborated by Rives, but neither did he deny it. Rives and Cooper had been friends and had met often socially; consequently, Cooper could not understand or accept the diplomatic silence that Rives chose to observe.

Cooper continued to be involved in the controversy through December 5, 1832, when he summarized his feelings about the controversy in a letter to the Philadelphia National Gazette.⁸ In 1834, in A Letter to His Countrymen, Cooper returned to the finance controversy, citing it as the impetus behind the spate of hostile reviews of The Bravo. That Cooper had been deeply hurt is obvious: "I say it with regret, but I say it with a deep conviction of its truth, that I believe this to be the only country in the world in which a citizen would be placed on trial, for

⁸The bulk of this letter is reprinted by Spiller in "Fenimore Cooper and Lafayette: The Finance Controversy," 38-40.

having refuted gross and unquestionable misstatement of the fair action of its own system" (Letter, p. 10).

For the first time, Cooper was in the position of seeking to justify to his countrymen actions of his own that seemed to him not only morally right but also unassailable; the necessity of doing so both surprised and irritated him. He was being attacked, he felt, for choosing to act toward Lafayette with sensibility rather than crass ingratitude--attacked, moreover, by the very people whose system of government he was defending.

As a result, Cooper began to suspect a serious failure of sensibility in a certain portion--the press--of the very country whose social and political system seemed ideally suited to the nurture of that quality. The "Cassio" review appears to have engendered the vogue of attacks on Cooper's concern with political issues in his fiction and on Cooper personally. The appearance of The Heidenmauer in September, 1832, gave reviewers the opportunity to attack Cooper's new stance as a "politician," his meddling in foreign affairs, and his boring moralism.⁹ The war against Cooper was on: throughout 1832 and 1833, the journals and papers constantly bombarded the reading public with attacks on Cooper, with Samuel F. B. Morse standing almost alone in America as advocate for the absent author.

⁹See Waples, Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper, pp. 98-99, for a summary of these reviews of The Heidenmauer.

Cooper was in the unenviable position of finding himself attacked where he had been lionized. Moreover, the attacks were characterized by an ill-breeding, indeed a vulgarity, which Cooper, accustomed to the reserved and well-bred social interaction of Europe, found appalling. On March 16, 1832, he wrote to his friend William Dunlap:

I rarely see my name mentioned even, with respect in any American publication, and in some I see it coupled with impertinences that I cannot think the writers would indulge in were I at home. . . . If I had seen one frank manly gentlemanly allusion to myself as a writer in a single American publication in five years I would not have thought of it. One fact is beyond dispute--I am not with my own country--the void between us is immense--which in advance time will show.¹⁰

What was most painful and bewildering to Cooper was the fact that the immense void separating him from his country was the result of his attempt to uphold American principles. With bitter irony he wrote to Horatio Greenough in July, 1832, of his proposed return home:

In order to insure myself a reception that shall not be mortifying, I have serious thoughts of writing an essay on the beauties of Aristocracy, and on the blessings of exclusiveness in religion, politicks, and trade, the whole to finish with a eulogium on the private character of the House of Brunswick. By puffing it myself, in the Quarterly, and forming an intimacy with all the bitterest enemies of America and American principles, it is not improbable that all I have hitherto done on the other side of the question may be overlooked, and the elite of my countrymen may be persuaded to spare their insults when my back is next turned. (L & J, II, 268)

¹⁰The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper, ed. James Franklin Beard, II (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), 237. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text as L & J.

Cooper wrote again to Greenough in the same vein on June 13, 1833: "I am the object of constant attacks in the American papers, and chiefly I believe because I have defended American principles and their action, in foreign countries. They who undervalue them are rewarded with office" (L & J, II, 360).

It was this disillusioned, even embittered Cooper who arrived in America on November 5, 1833. When he had sailed from New York on June 1, 1826, an Englishman of his acquaintance had called a greeting from a passing ship:

"How long do you mean to be absent?"

"Five years."

"You will never come back."

Cooper records the incident in Gleanings in Europe: France (1837): "I really began to think . . . that this call from the passing ship was meant to prepare me for the future. . . . So strong was this impression . . . that on our return, when the vessel passed the spot where the evil-omened prediction was uttered, I caught myself muttering involuntarily, '_____ is a false prophet; I have come back!'"¹¹ As Spiller says, however, there was something akin to truth in the "evil-omened prediction." Cooper never came back--not to the America he left.¹²

¹¹Gleanings in Europe: France, ed. Robert E. Spiller (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, American Branch, 1928), pp. 5-6.

¹²Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, p. 101.

The failure of sensibility reflected in the bad manners and journalistic irresponsibility of the press appeared in an even more alarming form in the cold, unfeeling reception from those people who had been Cooper's friends and associates. Four days after his return, he attended a dinner at the City Hotel--where he had enjoyed a flattering send-off in 1826--honoring his friend Commodore Isaac Chauncey. Although he knew over half of the guests personally, "without a single exception, those of his acquaintances who did speak to him (two-thirds did not) addressed him as if they had seen him the week before, and so cold and constrained did every man's manner seem, that he had great difficulty in persuading himself there was not something wrong. . . . The chill was so thorough, that he found it impossible to sit out the dinner" (L & J, III, 4-5).

Cooper records yet another incident reflecting his changed status upon his return to America: "A few days after my return, I met an old friend in the street. He appeared glad to see me--so glad, that I thought his reception one of the warmest it had been my good fortune to meet with. After a little conversation, I discovered that his joy proceeded from an impression that I had been dead some six or seven years" (Letter, p. 43).

Such a reception served, of course, to solidify Cooper's wary and even hostile response to his countrymen

on his return. It was, however, the alteration in the general tenor and temper of the times which threw the returning American into a kind of reverse culture shock: conditioned by seven years of refined living in sharply differentiated European society, Cooper stepped off the boat in New York into the theoretically classless society of Jacksonian democracy. It was a new era, already past its climactic mid-point when Cooper returned to it. Needless to say, sensibility in manners and morals was not one of its most salient characteristics.

Cooper always considered himself a democrat and, while he was in Europe, he reacted positively to many of Jackson's policies and actions.¹³ He praised Jackson's first annual message to Congress (L & J, II, 402, 411) and his stand on the French indemnity payments (the A. B. C. letters to William Cullen Bryant and William Leggett of the Evening Post, L & J, III, 61-139). His attitude is not always one of unqualified praise, however. In a letter to William Shubrick (May 1, 1831), Cooper questions whether Jackson is maintaining his ability to "make the flag respected" (L & J, II, 78). He never went so far, however, as to endorse the sentiment of the political economist,

¹³Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), pp. 375-80, cites Cooper as an enthusiastic supporter of the Jackson administration. Dorothy Waples, Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper, presents a detailed picture of Cooper as basically a Jacksonian democrat.

Henry C. Carey, who wrote to Cooper in July, 1832, of the cholera epidemic: "If it could only carry off Jackson and a few other of our politicians by trade, I would submit to all the inconvenience of it for a month or two" (Corres., I, 269).

It was not Jackson himself so much as it was the character of his followers, the "democratic mass," which gave Cooper a jolt. Cooper had eulogized his country in Notions of the Americans as a political structure in which the tone of manners, at all levels, was decent and respectful. In The Bravo he had underscored, by implication, the conviction that American republicanism encourages and sustains sensibility as a common denominator among members of different social classes. Upon his return to his country, however, he was met by a democratic mass who not only seemed devoid of good manners and the finer feelings, but who also shared some of the alarming weaknesses of the mob Cooper had portrayed in The Bravo.

That aspect of the era most inimical to the sensibilities of an American gentleman newly returned from Europe is captured in Mrs. Samuel Smith's eyewitness account of the reception following Jackson's unimpressive inaugural address:

The Majesty of the People had disappeared, & a rabble, a mob, of boys, negroes, women, children, scrambling, fighting, romping. What a pity, what a pity! No arrangement had been made, no police officers placed on duty & the whole house had been inundated by the rable mob. We came too late. The President, after having

been literally nearly pressed to death & almost suffocated & torn to pieces by the people in their eagerness to shake hands with Old Hickory, had retreated through the back way or south front & had escaped to his lodgings at Godsby's. Cut glass and china to the amount of several thousand dollars had been broken in the struggle to get refreshments, punch & other articles had been carried out in tubs and buckets, but had it been in hogsheads it would have been insufficient, ice-cream, & cake & lemonade for 20,000 people, for it is said that number were there, though I think the estimate exaggerated. Ladies fainted, men were seen with bloody noses & such a scene of confusion took place as is impossible to describe,--those who got in could not get out by the door again, but had to scramble out of windows.¹⁴

Justice Joseph Story, in a letter to his wife, reveals the same kind of revulsion at the behavior of the mob: "The great day . . . has passed away with its noise and tumult and hollow parade. . . . After the ceremony was over, the President went to the palace to receive company, and there he was visited by immense crowds of all sorts of people, from the highest and most polished down to the most vulgar and gross in the nation. I never saw such a mixture. The reign of King 'Mob' seemed triumphant."¹⁵ These accounts present a significant contrast to the bachelor's account in Notions of the Americans of the graceful mixing of classes when Mr. and Mrs. Monroe opened their home to the public.

¹⁴Quoted in American History: A Survey, 4th ed., by Richard Current, L. Harry Williams, and Frank Friedel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), p. 261.

¹⁵Life and Letters of Joseph Story, ed. William W. Story (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), pp. 562-63.

Twentieth century historians generally agree with Mrs. Smith and Justice Story in their portraits of the Jacksonian democrat. Carl Fish says of the American of the 1830's:

One thing upon which the travelers were competent to report was the public manners of the Americans. On this point they were almost at one: the manners were bad. Foremost was the almost universal male habit of chewing tobacco and then spitting . . . the "plug" was everywhere, and the bystander was fortunate when it was accompanied by its attendant spittoon. . . . Equally distasteful was the manner of eating. The prevalent impression derived from hotel and boarding house was that the knife was too much in evidence, particularly in the consumption of peas; one noted merchant used his for ice cream also. . . . More general still was the practice of eating rapidly, without conversation.¹⁶

More recently Edward Pessen, in Jacksonian America: Society, Personality and Politics, has drawn a portrait of the Jacksonian character which accords with these views and, in general, with the depiction of that character presented in Cooper's novels. Examining the comments of such travelers and observers as Alexis de Tocqueville, Frances Trollope, Captain Frederick Marrayat, and Harriet Martineau, Pessen constructs a composite picture of the Jacksonian which is almost uniformly unattractive: rude, curious, humorless, cold, cruel, violent, insecure, arrogant, practical, conformist, ill-mannered, greedy,

¹⁶The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850 (New York: Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 139.

gluttonous, unrefined, materialistic, prudish, snobbish, insensitive, anti-intellectual, and anti-traditional.¹⁷

Cooper's friends had warned him that such changes were occurring. Morse wrote in February, 1833: "You will be welcomed home, but come prepared to find many, very many things in taste and manners, different from your own good taste and manners" (Corres., I, 312). In October of the same year, while Cooper was en route to America, Shubrick warned: "The time that you have been abroad has made great changes, in everything that meets the eye; to us they have been gradual and almost unperceived, but will strike you with great force" (Corres., I, 323). Finally, the irascible Carey had predicted gloomily: "When you return here you will be almost as much shocked as Irving has been--not quite so much, as he was absent 16 years and you only 6. We have, however, made more progress downward in 6 years than we did in the previous 12" (Corres., I, 268).

What Cooper met on his return unfortunately bore out the estimates of his correspondents. He found the United States "altered, indeed, . . . but not quite so evidently improved . . . there was a vast expansion of mediocrity, that was well enough in itself, but which was

¹⁷Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1969), pp. 5-38.

so overwhelming as nearly to overshadow every thing that once stood prominent as more excellent" (L & J, III, 5-6).

"Every thing that once stood prominent as more excellent"--this is the key to Cooper's disillusionment with the Jacksonian democrats. Cooper wanted a democratic America in which all the positive refinements of the aristocratic past were retained.¹⁸ To the Jacksonian democrats, anything that even hinted of the "aristocratic" was the signal for extreme reaction. Henry Steele Commager points out, for example, that "William Henry Harrison was as rich as Martin Van Buren, but when it was established that Harrison drank hard cider from a jug and Van Buren sipped foreign wines from golden goblets, the triumph of Harrison was inevitable."¹⁹ Frances Wright, advocate of the people, wrote in Free Enquirer, May 3, 1830: "What distinguishes the present from every other struggle in which the human race has been engaged is that the present is evidently, openly and acknowledgedly a war of class. . . . It is the ridden people of the earth who are struggling to

¹⁸It was, of course, the "aristocracy of worth" and not the aristocracy of title that Cooper advocated. His European novels demonstrate the evils of this latter aristocracy.

¹⁹"The Nineteenth-Century American," Atlantic Monthly, 178 (December 1956), 74.

overthrow the 'booted and spurred riders' whose legitimate right to work and starve them will no longer pass current."²⁰

Such zealous democrats make no distinction, of course, between the "booted and spurred riders" and the "aristocracy of worth." Cooper would probably have agreed with both the vocabulary and the sentiments of the Englishman, Captain Frederick Marryat, who feared that society in America must disintegrate unless the aristocracy were reconstituted. He wrote in his Diary in America: "I do not mean an aristocracy of title; I mean an aristocracy of talent and power which wealth will give--an aristocracy which will lead society and purify it. . . . That the morals of the nation have retrograded from the total destruction of the aristocracy, both in the government and in society, which has taken place within the last ten years, is most certain."²¹

In his European novels, Cooper has detailed the dangers of titled Aristocracy and commercial Oligarchy. Both forms of government, he concluded, create insular, selfish minorities at the top, thereby cutting off desirable lines of communication between the leaders and the led. Upon his return to America, he began to suspect that such a communication gap existed in his own country as well.

²⁰Quoted by Dixon Ryan Fox in The Decline of the Aristocracy in the Politics of New York (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1919), p. 396.

²¹Quoted by Fox, p. 417.

Just as the blunted sensibilities of the leaders in the European novels make them immune to the sufferings and affections of their subjects, so the blunted sensibilities of the democratic majority make them oblivious to both the positive leadership and the moral rights of the "aristocracy of worth."

Respect for the past, for tradition, for superior quality in men and ideas was rapidly being replaced by a concern merely for the present moment, a mania for the new, and a worship of mediocrity in men and ideas.²² The belief that "one man is as good as another" was prohibiting the recognition of the superior qualities of the few in whose leadership, Cooper was fast coming to feel, lay America's best hope. The irresponsible disregard for the rights and property of others--masquerading under the guise of liberty--was a sign to Cooper that "the public" was becoming more powerful than principle. Cooper was convinced that in such an atmosphere and among such a people, sensibility could not survive. Its decline was indicative not only of a deterioration of manners, but also of a deterioration of morals.

What happened to him in his own Cooperstown must have seemed to Cooper the very stuff of which moral retrogression is made. The Three Mile Point controversy

²²Stow Persons, The Decline of American Gentility (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1973), discusses the changes that led to this decline.

probably did more than any other incident in Cooper's life to solidify his hostility toward the new breed of American he met on his return and to determine the direction of the treatment of sensibility in his subsequent novels.

Cooper had written to his nephew Richard from Paris, May 25, 1831, "Now my longing is for a Wilderness-- Cooperstown is far too populous and artificial for me and it is my intention to plunge somewhere into the forest, for six months in the year" (L & J, II, 89). After several months in New York, however, Cooperstown evidently seemed a kind of oasis to the Cooper family. Cooper purchased and renovated Otsego Hall, the Cooper family "mansion" that had furnished the setting for The Pioneers and was to do the same for Home As Found. The renovation itself was one of the points of contention between the cosmopolitan Coopers and the provincial residents of Cooperstown. With the help of Morse, Cooper remodeled the house in the new Gothic style, which struck the local residents--accustomed to seeing a gentleman's country house styled after a Greek temple--as "foreign." Moreover, the villagers had been in the habit of taking a short cut through the grounds of the Hall and were now in no mood to give up this custom for the convenience of a "hoity-toity" gentleman's family.

The real bone of contention was Three Mile Point, or Myrtle Grove, a small strip of land that jutted out

into Otsego Lake three miles from town. In his will, Judge Cooper left this bit of land to all his descendants in common until 1850, at which time it would revert to the youngest child named "William Cooper." Judge Cooper, using the Point for family outings only a few times a year, generously allowed the public to enjoy the pleasant picnic spot. During the years in which the Hall was unoccupied, the "legend" grew up that the Point was public property, willed to the townspeople by Judge Cooper--the villagers even erected a rude shanty on the spot. Cooper returned, purchased the Hall, qualified as the executor of his father's will, and sought to establish the rightful ownership of the Point.

Legendary rights are often harder to displace than legal rights, especially--or so Cooper believed--when the declarer is a newly-hatched democrat demanding his rights wherever his fancy happens to light. Cooper moved cautiously until a tree was cut down that had a sentimental association with his father. This total disregard not only for the legal right to property but also for its affective value to the owner constituted the kind of failure of sensibility which was especially disturbing to Cooper.

In July, 1837, Cooper sent a notice to the Freeman's Journal, indicating that the Point was private property. Before the notice could be published, rumors of it so angered the townspeople that they threatened Cooper. He

withdrew his original statement and replaced it with a legal notice against trespassing.²³ The townspeople immediately called a meeting, elected a chairman and a secretary, and passed a set of resolutions censuring Cooper ("democratic" practices that Cooper was to satirize in his later fiction). These resolutions bear quoting in full because their tone and content exemplify the character of the insensitive demagogue that Cooper came to detest. In fact, Cooper himself made them public by printing them at the head of a letter he addressed to the Freeman's Journal, August 28, 1837, considering these resolutions as "the most unanswerable mode of showing its [the meeting's] true character" (L & J, III, 283).

Cooper preceded the resolutions with this quotation from Henry VI, Part Two, IV, ii--an indication of the kind of contempt he was beginning to feel for leveling democrats: "There shall be, in England, seven half-penny loaves sold for a penny; the two [three] hooped pot shall have ten hoops; and I will make it a felony to drink small beer. All the realm shall be in common, and in Cheapside shall my palfrey go to grass." The italics and exclamation marks in the resolutions are Cooper's additions:

Resolved, by the aforesaid citizens, that we will wholly disregard the notice given by James F. Cooper, forbidding the public to frequent the Three Mile Point.

²³This notice is reprinted in L & J, III, 271.

Resolved, That inasmuch as it is well known that the late William Cooper intended the use of the Point in question for the citizens of the village and its vicinity, we deem it no more than a proper respect to the memory and intentions of the father, that the son should recognize the claim of the citizens to the use of the premises, even had he the power to deny it (!!!)

Resolved, That we will hold his threat to enforce title to the premises, as we do his whole conduct in relation to this matter, in perfect contempt.

Resolved, That the language and conduct of Cooper, in his attempt to procure acknowledgements of "liberality," and his attempt to force the citizens into "asking" his permission to use the premises, has been such as to render himself odious to a greater portion of the citizens of this community.

Resolved, also, that we will and do denounce any man as sycophant, who has or shall ask permission of James F. Cooper to visit the Point in question.

Resolved, we do recommend to, and request the Trustees of the Franklin Library in this village, to remove all books of which Cooper is the author, from said Library.

Resolved, That the proceedings of the meeting be signed by the chairman and secretary, and published in the village papers. Dated July 24th, 1837.
(Rpt. L & J, III, 285)

In the letter which follows these resolutions, Cooper's growing disenchantment with the American public and the American press is clear. Cooper locates in the "mob mind" that drew up the resolutions the brashness and vulgarity which ride rough-shod over the finer feelings. The sharpness, the acerbity, the condescension which will characterize the tone of his future fiction are all foreshadowed:

I am told there were two members of the bar present [at the meeting], who made the unexceptionable proposition to ascertain the facts before any other

steps were taken; but this was deemed a measure altogether beneath the dignity of the public then and there assembled. What were facts and documents to them; were they not the people; omnipotent? They made their facts as they went along. They were determined that their palfrises should go to grass on Myrtle Point. . . . No truth is better established than the fact that sordid and grovelling minded men are always the first to seize upon favors, and the last to acknowledge them. (L & J, III, 283)

This was Cooper's second letter within a month to the Freeman's Journal, the first being a detailed summary of the Cooper right to the Point and the public's infraction against that right (L & J, III, 276-82). Cooper felt forced into such a defense of himself because Elias Porter Pellet, editor of The Chenango Telegraph of Norwich, New York, had maligned Cooper in an editorial, reprinted by Thurlow Weed in the Albany Evening Journal, August 12, and by Andrew M. Barber in the Otsego Republican, August 14. Pellet says, in part:

This gentleman [Cooper], not satisfied with having drawn down upon his head universal contempt from abroad, has done the same thing for himself at Cooperstown, where he resides. . . . The littleness of the act complained of, may be inferred from the fact that Three Mile Point is a piece of land--a projection into the lake--which can be put to no earthly use for grass or tillage. So stands the matter at present, Mr. J. F. C. threatening the citizens on the one hand, and being derided and despised by them on the other. We think his haughty insolence has received a rebuke now which will do him good. (Rpt. in L & J, III, 282)

This brief excerpt contains several examples of the kind of insensitivity which Cooper came to identify as specifically American: ill-bred, even crude, personal criticism; the

evaluation of everything in terms of profit and return; and the consequent refusal to recognize the importance of sentimental attachment. The editorial was the basis for the legal action Cooper afterward initiated against Pellet, Barber, and Weed. It began what was for Cooper a long legal battle that lasted from 1837 to 1843.²⁴

As a result of all this controversy with the townspeople and the press, Cooper quite naturally began to look upon both groups as symbolic of that kind of leveling fatal to the individual's right to live as he chose. His growing bitterness at the failure of sensibility in the democratic majority and his sense of being a displaced person among his own countrymen are obvious in a letter to Horatio Greenough, June 31, 1838:

There is very little attachment to home, in my family. The tastes and habits of the girls are above the country, and they take refuge in themselves against ill-breeding, coarse flirtations and ignorance. They try to love their country, but duty lies at the bottom of the effort, and not feeling. They have been ill-treated, too, and that does not increase the attachment. The fact cannot be concealed, it is a country of mediocrity of a high order, but after all, of mediocrity. Nothing that is above the common mind is, or can be, appreciated, and, while that common mind, as such, is unusually respectable, it is nothing but a common mind. The extraordinary material propensity of the nation has forced so much dross to the surface, that it is difficult to get at the pure ore. Then high qualities of every sort, are too much scattered by distances, to make head against the enemy.

²⁴This legal controversy and those that followed it have been ably investigated by Ethel R. Outland in The "Effingham" Libels on Cooper, Univ. of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 28 (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1929).

America is no country for a man of tastes, sentiments, affections, or tone. All would be annihilated in the social pele mele. A century may change this, but in a century you may live in marble perhaps, but I shall be forgotten, and my children with me--I could like to live while I do live, and a state of society to make me happy. . . . In short, my good friend, this is a country with no principles, but party, no God, but money, and this, too, with very little sentiment, taste, breeding, or knowledge. (L & J, III, 330-31)

As disillusioned as Cooper sounds in this letter, he did not give up on his country. Rather he took it upon himself to become that country's mentor and chastiser, pointing out its failure of sensibility through the vehicles of direct comment; negative portraits of morally insensitive leveling democrats; and positive portraits of sensitive, refined ladies and gentlemen. He set out to achieve his purpose by what seemed to him a simple metamorphosis: shedding the cloak of moral romanticist and donning the cloak of moral realist. Little that Cooper wrote after the European novels recaptures the imaginative, myth-making quality of his earlier works.

Nowhere is the contrast between the old and the new Cooper clearer than in a juxtaposition of Notions of the Americans (1828) and The American Democrat (1838), Cooper's "textbook" on American republicanism in Jacksonian America. Notions of the Americans, says James Beard, "remains a classic statement (perhaps the classic statement) of the 'American Dream'" (L & J, I, xxiii). By the time Cooper came to write The American Democrat, much of the bright promise of the American Dream had faded.

The "equality of condition" which Cooper lauds in Notions, he flatly denies in The American Democrat: "Equality of condition is incompatible with civilization, and is found only to exist in those communities that are but slightly removed from the savage state. . . . The rights of property being an indispensable condition of civilization . . . equality of condition is rendered impossible."²⁵ Nor are all men "created equal"--either in a physical or a moral sense: "inequalities of condition, of manners, of mental cultivation must exist, unless it be intended to reduce all to the level of ignorance and vulgarity, which would be virtually to return to a condition of barbarism" (AD, p. 76). What was "elevating" in Notions has become "leveling" in The American Democrat.

In Notions of the Americans and The Bravo, Cooper had suggested that sensibility can and should link social classes together. Once he encounters the peculiar character of the democratic majority in America and once he becomes the victim of their insensitivity in Cooperstown, this conviction is drastically altered. In The American Democrat, Cooper begins to identify "harder" distinctions between social levels and even to advocate enforced distances between social groups. Moreover, he begins to suspect that the upper social class--at least those members of it

²⁵The American Democrat (1838; rpt. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), pp. 36, 39. Subsequent references will be cited in the text as AD.

who comprise the "aristocracy of worth"--is separated from the lower not only by sensibility in the form of refined manners, but also sensibility in the form of moral perception.

In the European novels, it is primarily the members of the aristocracy who are unfeeling and oppressive; in The American Democrat, it is the democratic mass whose feelings are blunted by coarseness and whose shouts for "equality" oppress the few. The tyranny of the aristocratic minority has been replaced by the tyranny of the democratic majority:²⁶

It is unjust to require that men of refinement and training should defer in their habits and associations to the notions of those who are their inferiors in these particulars. . . . All, who are in the least cultivated, know how irksome and oppressive is the close communion with ignorance and vulgarity. . . . Manners, education and refinement, are positive things . . . and it is as unjust to deny their possessors their indulgence, as it would be to insist on the less fortunate's passing the time they would rather devote to athletic amusements, in listening to operas for which they have no relish. . . . Some men fancy that a democrat can only be one who seeks the level, social, mental, and moral, of the majority, a rule that would at once exclude all men of refinement, education and taste from the class. . . . He is the purest democrat who best maintains his rights, and no rights can be dearer to a man of cultivation, than exemptions from unseasonable invasions of his time by the coarse-minded and ignorant. (AD, pp. 86, 88, 91)

²⁶In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville had, of course, used the same phrase--"tyranny of the majority"--in Democracy in America, ed. J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner; trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 231.

Having reached the conclusion that sensibility was degenerating in the great majority of Americans, Cooper-- as a conscientious democrat and an unflagging moralist-- set about apprising his countrymen of the dangers of the situation. When his political treatise, The American Democrat, elicited only meager response, Cooper returned to the genre of the novel with Homeward Bound and Home As Found, both published in 1838. These are not good novels; they were written hastily in the heat of the Three Mile Point controversy and, except for the adventure portions of Homeward Bound, they are made to bear the weight of too much social commentary. They are indispensable, however, to an understanding of Cooper's changing treatment of sensibility. In these novels, certain important views and literary approaches are evident for the first time in Cooper's fiction.²⁷

Cooper identifies the works as novels of manners in the preface of Homeward Bound: his purpose is "to exhibit the state of society in the United States, through the agency, in part of a set of characters with different

²⁷Marvin Meyers, The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief (Stanford, California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1957) cites yet another dimension of these novels-- their significance for the historian: "a means of access to the ethos of a people undergoing drastic changes in their condition and so a way of touching the contemporary meaning of such changes," p. 42. Meyers titles the fourth chapter of his book, "The Great Descent: On Cooper and the Age of Dodge and Bragg."

peculiarities, who had freshly arrived from Europe and to whom the distinctive features of the country would be apt to present themselves with greater force, than to those who had never lived beyond the influence of the things portrayed."²⁸ The positive members of this set of characters are the Effinghams--John, his cousin Edward, and the latter's daughter Eve. Two of their fellow passengers share similar educational backgrounds, cultural interests, and refinement of manners: Paul Powis, the genteel hero, who turns out to be Paul Effingham, the son of John Effingham; and Sir George Templemore, an English baronet traveling under the name of his servingman, Mr. Blunt.

Cooper has a triple purpose in including the Englishman. He acts as a kind of "straight man" whose incredulity at some of the practices of democratic America gives Cooper the opportunity to draw telling contrasts between refined manners in England and vulgar manners in America. At the same time, Templemore stands in obvious contrast to the forger who has assumed the baronet's identity, but who lacks the polish and refinement of the real baronet. Perhaps Sir George's most important function is to serve as a foil for Paul Powis/Effingham, the genteel hero: as attractive and refined as Templemore is, Paul outshines

²⁸Homeward Bound, or The Chase, p. iii. This and all subsequent references to Cooper's novels are to The Works of James Fenimore Cooper, Mohawk edition, 33 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

him in every department, both physical and moral. Cooper never ceased to believe that the finest American, the cultivated man whose moral imagination is fully operative, is the superior of any man on earth, regardless of social class. In fact, Eve Effingham, Cooper's most elegant-- and most outspoken--heroine is sure that "the position of an American gentleman might readily become, nay, that it ought to be, the highest of all human stations, short of that of sovereigns" (HF, p. 182).

Eve places not only Paul Powis but also her cousin John and her father into this category. They are, in fact, "more than noble" if nobility is counted in terms of rank: "respected for their manners, admired for their personal appearance, manly, courteous, and of noble bearing and principles," (HF, p. 182), they possess a moral superiority that rank cannot convey. Moral sensibility, not hereditary titles, is their hallmark; Eve tells Sir George Templemore: "Sentiment is at the bottom of our nobility; and the great seal at the bottom of yours" (HF, p. 35). It is primarily through the sensitive, perceptive Effinghams that Cooper records his own "shock of recognition" at the manners and morals of Jacksonian democracy.

Robert Spiller contends that "the chronicle of manners intention scarcely survives the first page of

Homeward Bound."²⁹ Yet it is difficult to imagine how Cooper could have chosen a more fortuitous setting for the demonstration of manners and morals. The Montauk, the ship which brings the Effinghams home to America, not only serves as a microcosm peopled with varied social types, but it also offers the kind of enforced proximity in which the clash of these types cannot help but occur. Nowhere is this clash set in bolder relief than when the Effinghams come up against Steadfast Dodge.

Dodge, identified by D. H. Lawrence as "the demagogue who has 'done' Europe and put it in his breeches pocket, in a month" is the Yankee editor of the Active Enquirer.³⁰ In his earlier fiction, Cooper occasionally depicted Yankees--like Harvey Birch and Long Tom Coffin--as heroic and self-effacing. When his portraits were not complimentary, as in the case of Hiram Doolittle in The Pioneers and David Gamut in Last of the Mohicans, they were at least tolerant. By 1838, however, Cooper had come to see the Yankee as the epitome of the insensitive,

²⁹Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, p. 260.

³⁰Studies in Classic American Literature (1923; rpt. New York: The Viking Press, 1964), p. 38. Although Cooper does not specifically label Dodge as a "Yankee," suggestions to that effect--he is of "pious ancestry," for example--are strong. Lewis Leary, Introduction to Home As Found (1838; rpt. New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), concludes that Cooper intended Dodge as a New Englander come to New York, p. xvii. See James W. Tuttleton, "The New England Character in Cooper's Social Novels," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, 70 (1966), 305-17, for a discussion of the Yankee in Cooper's fiction.

greedy, leveling democrat, who posed perhaps the greatest threat to the aristocracy of worth.

For all his "law honesty" and "pious ancestry," Dodge is garrulous, nosy, and crude--just the kind of person, in fact, with whom the man of cultivation finds close communion "irksome and oppressive" (AD, p. 86). Lacking the background, education, and refinement of the Effinghams, Dodge, despite his brief jaunt in Europe, has done nothing to improve his boorish manners and everything to make himself insufferably arrogant.

In observing the Dodges of the 1830's, Alexis de Tocqueville declared that Americans, like all democratic peoples, desired not freedom, but equality. Liberty requires sacrifice and effort; its pleasures are not always immediate. Equality, on the other hand, offers its pleasures free in little enjoyments that come daily.³¹ Steadfast Dodge insists upon frequent contact with the Effinghams, assuming that "there is no exclusion in an American ship" (HB, p. 99). He moves among the Effinghams uninvited, but with the absolute assurance in his own mind that men are "every way equal" and "one man is as good as another." When the Effinghams do not respond with the familiar ease that Dodge expects, he mutters darkly to the other passengers: "We shall see! America is not a country in which people can shut themselves up in rooms and fancy

³¹Democracy in America, pp. 473-76.

they are lords and ladies" (HE, p. 177). To prove his point, he sneaks into the Effinghams' stateroom and reads their mail while they are away.

Since the captain of a ship stands as an accepted and undisputed authority at sea, Dodge's slavishness to majority opinion looks doubly ridiculous on shipboard. He insists on a vote to determine the location of the ship and assures Captain Truck that public opinion is "setting strong" against his decision to change course. Cooper almost loses his best symbol of necessary authority in the first few pages of the novel by making Truck a garrulous, intrusive man who offends with his redundant, ill-timed introductions. Cooper soon realizes, however, that Truck is his best foil for Dodge. The inept editor, while he insists that no man is his superior, consults the majority opinion on everything; the captain, while he defers to the social superiority of the Effinghams, consults only his own skill and authority in the sailing of his ship.

Homeward Bound ends when the Montauk deposits its passengers in New York after they have narrowly escaped capture in an exciting encounter with the Arabs and outrun an English ship, the Foam. This latter ship is pursuing the Montauk in quest of a forger, who has assumed the name, if not the manners, of Sir George Templemore. The pursuit and escape motif may have been Cooper's attempt to capitalize

on a successful device of his earlier fiction. Nevertheless, it has the additional function of separating the morally sensitive from the morally insensitive. Just as Dodge cowers behind majority opinion, so he cowers behind a sand dune when the Arabs are near and hangs back with the women when help is needed to man the boats. The Effinghams and Paul Powis behave quite differently during the hours of danger: Eve, her cousin and father, spend much time in prayer, offering to Captain Truck whatever services they can perform. Paul and Sir George (the real baronet) refuse to leave the Effinghams to save themselves. In fact Paul becomes the savior of the entire group. When the hostile Arabs board the Montauk while Truck and most of his seamen are away, Paul manages to get a small boat into the water. Having spent a number of years in naval service, he skillfully maneuvers the craft to effect the escape of the Effinghams from the natives. Cooper continues to make skill in seamanship concomitant with nobility of character and moral perceptiveness.

In Home As Found, Cooper's consuming interest in the manners and morals of Jacksonian America takes precedence over plot. Indeed, Home As Found is essentially plotless; it is a series of vignettes baring the ugliness, the provincialism, and the insensitivity of American society. Not since Precaution has Cooper been so engrossed with sensibility on the level of manners. In that first

novel, set in England, coarse manners are the exception rather than the rule; the Jarvises, who had acquired enough wealth to let a house near the Moseleys, are the only acquaintances of the Moseleys who offend with vulgar manners. In the Jacksonian America of the 1830's, the refined and sensitive Effinghams, a dwindling coterie, are besieged on every side by coarseness and vulgarity.

They escape briefly from Steadfast Dodge, but he is replaced almost immediately by Aristabulus Bragg, Edward Effingham's lawyer. Cooper obviously believes that Bragg is basically superior to the spineless, hypocritical Dodge, but unfortunately Bragg's positive qualities have been stymied and corrupted in an environment designed to "equalize" rather than to develop human potential. Consequently, Bragg is a man to whom "nothing is too high to be aspired to, nothing too low to be done" (HF, p. 10). He coolly decides at his first meeting with Eve Effingham that he will shortly make her his wife. He proposes to her forthwith--whittling all the while--and is undaunted by her refusal. When he finally concedes that she is irretrievably lost to Paul Powis/Effingham, he promptly weds her French maid.

Cooper's point is that it is not possible in a leveling democracy to avoid people like Dodge and Bragg. As Dodge so smugly says, "There is no exclusion in an American ship." Moreover, a man of Edward Effingham's

wealth and habits must have a lawyer, and Bragg may well be the best of a bad lot. As a result, Bragg is one of Eve Effingham's first dinner guests when she assumes the direction of her father's townhouse on Hudson Square in New York. The quiet, leisurely, elegant French service is unsuited both to Bragg's "go-aheadism" and his acquisitive nature. Using his knife "as a coal heaver uses his shovel," (HF, p. 17), he rakes into his plate all of the food near him. Cooper--who declares in The American Democrat that "the Americans are the grossest feeders in the world"--seems to take a special delight in having the French butler remove Bragg's loaded plate while the lawyer "guzzles" champagne.

Bragg offends not only through his bad manners but also through his failure to recognize and appreciate genuine sentiment. The Effinghams, out of gratitude for Captain Truck's courage and skill in the affair of the Arabs, present him with several pieces of silver: a punch bowl, a watch, a set of coal tongs, and a deck trumpet. Truck, although he does not share the Effinghams' refinement of manners and taste, is perceptive enough to realize their superiority in these areas and defer to it. He is a good-hearted man, whose better feelings have not been "democratically leveled" out of existence--perhaps because most of his time is spent in an environment, the sea, where the leveling process has not penetrated.

His response to the Effinghams' affection and esteem is genuine and profound. He feelingly declares to Eve, "This bowl is as precious in my eyes as if it were made of my father's bones." Bragg, who has been crudely hefting each piece of silver to get an idea of its weight and value, replies: "You may indeed think so, for its cost could not be less than a hundred dollars" (HF, p. 27).

In order to demonstrate the pervasiveness of such bad manners and insensitivity in Jacksonian America, Cooper devotes the first quarter of the novel to a catalogue of parlors. He first establishes the ideal drawing room in the residence of the Effinghams on Hudson Square, where the graciousness and sensibility of this "aristocracy of worth" provide an obvious contrast to such vulgar intrusions as those of the Dodges and the Braggs. In New York the only parlor where the Effinghams find taste, refinement, and good manners commensurate with their own is that of Mrs. Hawker, a true lady of seventy, who is as genuine and sensitive in welcoming Captain Truck as she is in greeting the Effinghams.

The other three drawing rooms--Mrs. Jarvis', Mrs. Hudson's, and Mrs. Legend's--all demonstrate the negative effect of leveling democracy on American society. In the Jarvis parlor, Cooper contrasts Mr. Jarvis' sagacity in deferring to the superiority of Edward Effingham with Mrs. Jarvis' professed "republicanism." Jarvis accepts Mr.

Effingham's invitations to dinner but does not return them because, he tells his wife, his host will be "better pleased with such a tacit acknowledgement of his superiority in this respect than by any bustling and ungraceful efforts to pay him in kind" (HF, pp. 44-45). Jarvis' political philosophy comes straight from The American Democrat: "A republic does not necessarily infer equality of condition, or even equality of rights--it meaning merely the substitution of the right of the common wealth for the right of a prince" (HF, pp. 43-44).

Mrs. Jarvis, on the other hand, is annoyed by the Effinghams' reserve toward her--is she not, she protests, as good as anybody? She is aghast, however, at her husband's suggestion that she visit the grocers' wives: her "republicanism" consists of considering herself the superior of all beneath her and the equal of all above her. The quality of her "taste" is measured by her ecstasy at having procured as her guest for the evening a "great traveler": Steadfast Dodge.

In Mrs. Houston's drawing room, where the Effinghams attend a ball, Cooper demonstrates the effects of mediocrity and provincialism on the manners and morals of the American female. He juxtaposes the self-confident, poised, and thoroughly feminine Eve Effingham with the simpering, clinging, breathless Miss Ring. In order to secure her position as belle of the evening, Miss Ring frantically

juggles coqueties and inanities in an attempt to keep six bored, yawning swains in her immediate vicinity (HF, pp. 65-67). While she considers the slaughtering of reputations a suitable avocation for a young lady, she declares that it is the epitome of vulgarity for Eve to walk across a room without a male escort (HF, p. 71).

Cooper found this inability to distinguish between "conventional propriety" and "true propriety" all too common in America. The fact that he makes Miss Ring into a type--she has no first name, nor does her rival belle, "Miss Trumpet"--identifies her as a member of a much larger class. She has the delicate features and frame typical of the American woman, but she "lacks the proper training which would have rendered her the beau-ideal of feminine delicacy and gentleness" (HF, p. 64).

In yet another drawing room, Mrs. Legend's, Cooper portrays the failure of sensibility in literary taste. In Notions of the Americans, Cooper had admitted that his country had "scarcely a work of art that attains to mediocrity," but he concluded that the "simple dignity in moral truths" helped to compensate for the lack.³² By 1838 Cooper is less tolerant of the deficiency; his portraits of the sham literati in Mrs. Legend's parlor

³²James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of the Americans, Picked Up By a Traveling Bachelor (1828; rpt. New York: Frederic Ungar Publishing Company, 1963).

are among his most scathing. These pseudo-intellectuals simper about literature they have not read and could not understand if they did. "Taste," says Cooper, "whether in the arts, literature, or anything else, is a natural impulse, like love" (HF, p. 79). For Mrs. Legend and her guests, memorizing a few titles, authors and scattered lines of poetry qualifies one as an expert.

Cooper draws his harshest--and funniest--portrait of this spurious literati when he has them mistake the old salt, Captain Truck, for an English poet and bombard him with meaningless literary questions:

"Pray, Mr. Truck . . . is it commonly thought in the English literary circles, that Byron was a development of Shakespeare, or Shakespeare a shadowing forth of Byron?"

"Both, marm," said the captain with a coolness that would have done credit to Aristabulus, "all incline to the first opinion, and most to the last."
(HF, p. 93)

Needless to say, his hearers are charmed by such "finesse." The failure of literary taste which appeared briefly in the Jarvis girls in Precaution has been multiplied many times in the American society of the late 1830's.

The drawing room is not the only area of democratic America where the Effinghams discover a failure of sensibility. The greediness and "go-aheadism" of Aristabulus Bragg is symptomatic of a widespread epidemic of buying and selling. The desire to get rich quick has seized all classes. Cooper devotes the whole of Chapter VII in Home

As Found to a description of the mania for fast money in Wall Street. When John Effingham, touring the Stock Exchange with Sir George Templemore, asks the history of a piece of property, the speculator readily obliges. The breathless rapidity of his account suggests the very attitude toward property that Cooper is lamenting:

"With great pleasure, Mr. Effingham; we know you to have means, and hope you may be induced to purchase. This was the farm of old Volkert Van Brunt, five years since, off of which he and his family had made a livelihood for more than a century, by selling milk. Two years since, the sons sold it to Peter Feeler for a hundred an acre, or for the total sum of five thousand dollars. The next spring Mr. Feeler sold it to John Search, as keen a one as we have, for twenty-five thousand. Search sold it at private sale to Nathan Rise for fifty thousand the next week, and Rise had parted with it to a company, before the purchase, for a hundred and twelve thousand, cash. The map ought to be taken down--for it is now eight months since we sold it out in lots, at auction, for the gross sum of three hundred thousand dollars. As we have received out commission, we look at that land as out of the market for a time." (HF, p. 101)

The conflagration that destroys the Stock Exchange--"that bustling temple of Mammon" (HF, p. 108)--and much of Wall Street is Cooper's way of calling down the wrath of God upon the decline of sentiment associated with family and property.

Disregard for such attachments is a strike at the very foundations of society; out of these attachments emerge responsible community leaders like Marmaduke Temple, Oliver Effingham, and Edward Effingham. Cooper is not merely attempting to capitalize on an earlier success when he repeats in Home As Found the setting and characters of

The Pioneers. The Templeton Effinghams of the 1830's are the descendants of Oliver Effingham and Elizabeth Temple. The marriage of Oliver and Elizabeth marks the continuation of two noble and generous families; the Effinghams are the culmination of that nobility and generosity.

The situation has altered considerably, however. The marriage of Eve Effingham and Paul Effingham (Paul Powis turns out to be John Effingham's son and thus Eve's second cousin) indicates how the aristocracy of worth has decreased in number: now only an Effingham is worthy of an Effingham. Eve's American alternatives in the 1830's are not very promising: two leveling democrats--a bungling newspaper editor and a whittling lawyer. Oliver and Elizabeth are appreciated for their generosity and respected for their social and moral superiority; in 1794 sensibility still binds men together. Paul and Eve do not have this assurance. In a society where feelings are blunted by mediocrity and vulgarity, the Effinghams and the few like them will be forced to retreat, to spend their energies in self-preservation rather than community leadership.

Aristabulus Bragg is the spokesman for the kind of failure of sensibility which is isolating the Effinghams and striking at the stability of the community. He cannot

conceive of the attachment to place which Sir George Templemore extols and the Effingham's value. A conversation between Bragg and Templemore early in Home As Found identifies the disease of a nation:

"I believe, Sir George," continued Mr. Bragg, "that in England men are tolerably stationary."

"We love to continue for generations on the same spot. We love the tree that our forefathers planted, the roof that they built, the fireside by which they sat, the sod that covers their remains."

"Very poetical, and I dare say there are situations in life in which such feelings come in without much effort. It must be a great check to business operations, however, in your part of the world, sir!"

"Business operations! what is business, as you term it, sir, to the affections, to the recollections of ancestry, and to the solemn feelings connected with history and tradition. . . . Will you permit me to ask, Mr. Bragg, if you feel no local attachments yourself . . . if one tree is not more pleasant than another; the house you were born in more beautiful than a house into which you never entered; or the altar at which you have long worshipped, more sacred than another at which you never knelt?"

"_____ A human being is not a cat, to love a locality rather than its own interests. . . . The pleasantest tree I can remember was one of my own, out of which the sawyers made a thousand feet of clear stuff, to say nothing of middlings. The house I was born in was pulled down shortly after my birth, as indeed has been its successor, so I can tell you nothing on that head; and as for altars, there are none in my persuasion." (pp. 23, 24, 25)

It is this kind of total disregard for tradition and affections which precipitates the Fishing Point controversy in Home As Found. The fictional episode closely parallels the facts of the actual controversy between Cooper and the inhabitants of Cooperstown. The fact that

the Point has no economic possibilities, that it is merely a lovely spot full of pleasant memories and sentimental attachments for the family, underscores Cooper's message. The public--John Effingham terms it "the all-powerful, omnipotent, over-ruling, law-making, law-breaking public" (HF, p. 205)--might have respected the Point's "profit index," but emotional attachments completely elude their blunted sensibilities.

Cooper appropriately precedes the eruption of the Point controversy with the Effinghams' tribute to Natty Bumppo. On an outing, the Effinghams and their guests come upon the spot where Natty's hut once stood. Eve voices the tribute: "A man who had the simplicity of a woodsman, the heroism of a savage, the faith of a Christian, and the feelings of a poet. A better man than he, after his fashion, seldom lived" (HF, p. 196). John Effingham voices the tragedy: "Alas! . . . the days of the 'Leather-Stockings' have passed away. He preceded me in life, and I see few remains of his character in a region where speculation is more rife than moralizing, and emigrants are plentier than hunters" (HF, p. 197). As Marvin Meyers suggests, Cooper intends, by recalling Natty, "to juxtapose primitive virtue and present degradation,"--that is, to contrast Natty Bumppo, the "masterpiece of the presocial democracy of the woods" with Aristabulus Bragg, his inadequate but active counterpart in the "democracy of the

clearing." As Meyers perceives, however, a more subtle comparison is that between Natty and the Effinghams: "Both are worthy models for America: both have been banished from the settlements, one to the remote prairie, the other behind the walls of privacy."³³

In the "birds of passage," the "creatures of an hour," (as Edward Effingham calls them, HF, p. 224), who seek to appropriate the Point, liberty has been corrupted into a false democracy which thrives on the misconception that majority opinion is its own excuse for being. Legality, tradition, sentiment are nothing to men who have set up themselves for idols. When Edward Effingham assures Bragg that he holds the legal title to the Point, Bragg stubbornly insists, "The public must have some claim, for it is impossible that everybody should be mistaken" (HF, p. 211). Cooper had already made his most cutting evaluation of public opinion in his satire, The Monikins, in 1835: in Leaphigh (England), the Monikins take pride in the length of their tails, while in Leaplow (America), all the Monikins cut their tails to the same length to prevent an "aristocracy of intellect"--the mind is located in the tail--which would "be an end of [their] liberties." The lopped-off tails are sold to the daily journals, where they are ground up and dispensed as public opinion (Chap. 17). Bragg in Home As Found warns his employer that

³³The Jacksonian Persuasion, p. 72.

a "public excitement" is more powerful than a legal claim-- if the matter goes to a jury, a verdict in the face of popular feeling "is rather a hopeless matter" (HF, p. 212).

This same kind of arrogance characterizes the attitude of the democratic mass toward God and the church. In Cooper's early fiction, religious humility is one of the major forms of sensibility which links men together regardless of social class. Cooper's Episcopal genteel hero is as humble as Natty Bumppo or Harvey Birch. By the 1830's, however, the situation has changed. The genteel characters are still humble in spirit, but the members of the democratic majority have decided that their slogan of "one man is as good as another" includes God as well as man.

The Effinghams' fellow church members are determined to remove the pews, lower the pulpit, and raise the floor "amphitheatre fashion" in order to give the people a "good lookout" (HF, p. 187). Eve's horrified protests elicit only insensitive arrogance from Bragg and Dodge. Bragg assures her that "the people will rule, and it is useless to pretend to tell them that they shall not have the highest seats in the church as well as in the state" (HF, p. 189). Dodge, like Bragg a member of the "standing order," is even more confident: "To my notion, gentlemen and ladies, God never intended an American to kneel" (HF, p. 190). John Effingham voices Cooper's sad commentary on Jacksonian America when he tells Eve, "You have yet to

learn, Miss Effingham, that men can get to be so saturated with liberty, that they become insensitive to the nicer feelings" (HF, p. 240).

This kind of criticism of America is typical not only of cynical John Effingham, but to a lesser degree of all the genteel characters in the Home novels--even Cooper's heroine. It represents a shift in Cooper's view of one kind of sensibility, the sentiment of patriotism. In the fourth preface to The Spy, written in 1831, Cooper still looks upon patriotism as unequivocal loyalty: "There is a purity in real patriotism which elevates its subject above all the grosser motives of selfishness. . . . It has the beauty of self-elevation, without the alloy of personal interest."³⁴ This is the kind of patriotism exhibited by Harvey Birch, the Red Rover, and Cooper's genteel heroes.

In the preface to Satanstoe (1845), Cooper presents a radically different view of patriotism:

For ourselves, we conceive that true patriotism consists in laying bare every thing like public vice, and in calling such things by their right names. The great enemy of the race has made a deep inroad upon us, within the last ten or a dozen years, under cover of a spurious delicacy on the subject of exposing national ills; and it is time that they who have not been afraid to praise, when praise was merited, should not shrink from the office of censuring when the want of timely warnings may be one cause of the most fatal ills. (p. iv)

³⁴The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831), p. v.

Even though Cooper did not formulate this altered definition until 1845, the Effinghams of the Home novels demonstrate it in 1838. They think of themselves as loyal Americans, but they--like their creator--find more to criticize in their country than to praise.

The inevitable result is a change in both the nature of sensibility and Cooper's presentation of it. In Cooper's earlier novels, the sensibility of his characters emerges naturally and logically out of their actions and personalities. In the Home novels, Cooper tries to superimpose sensibility upon his characters through direct auctorial comment and through statements by the characters themselves. Consequently, the Effinghams spend more time talking about sensibility than they do in exercising it. Marmaduke Temple expends his time and energies in generous, positive influence; the Effinghams spend much of their in retreating from the vulgar majority and trying to maintain their status.

While this very distinction is an important part of Cooper's message, it renders his major characters less attractive. Certain of the Effinghams' actions and conversations border on snobbery and condescension. On the Montauk, they listen to Steadfast Dodge's readings of his inane travel journal not so much to be gracious as to amuse themselves at his expense. In Home As Found, they accept the invitation to Mrs. Jarvis' parlor so that

they can demonstrate "bad society" to Sir George Templemore. At Mrs. Legend's, John and Eve Effingham, for their own amusement, encourage--if they do not instigate--the misconception that Captain Truck is a literary figure.

In some ways, Edward Effingham is Cooper's quintessential gentleman: certainly, he has the physical excellence, the impressive voice, the refinement of manners, even the generosity of Cooper's earlier gentlemen. His sensibility is confined within narrower limits, however, than that of Cooper's earlier "ethical heroes." His concerns are more personal, less community-oriented than those of Marmaduke Temple or Duncan Heyward--or even Mark Heathcote.

This new dimension to Cooper's characterization, as well as the thinly veiled and highly complimentary portraits of himself and his family in the Home novels, did not endear him to the American public. Newspaper editors immediately attacked Cooper in scathing reviews for his criticism of American manners. Park Benjamin's vilification is typical: "The superlative dolt! Did he imagine that he was the only person in the country that had ever traveled to Europe?"³⁵ The result of such attacks was, of course, law suits by Cooper, who sometimes presented his

³⁵Quoted by Ethal Outland, p. 78. Outland discusses the libel suits that Cooper instigated in answer to this and other critical reviews of the Home novels.

own case, but more often assisted his lawyer-nephew, Richard Cooper. In Cooper's libel suit against James Watson Webb, the defendant's lawyer spent eleven hours reading the Home novels aloud in their entirety in the courtroom to prove that his client's statements about them did not constitute libel. In refutation, Richard Cooper read most of both novels aloud a second time. Cooper asked to be excused from the courtroom during the reading, but the irrepressible Park Benjamin remained to hear and departed to scoff in the New World:

It is hard enough to be compelled to look into one of Cooper's late novels in the solitude of one's library, when the tedium of the labor can be relieved by an occasional dip into Calvin's Institutes--but to be forced to sit and hear them read!--Oh, it was too much--five jurymen are supposed to have been carried out fainting.³⁶

Such attacks not only spurred Cooper to new libel suits, but they also reinforced his increasingly critical attitude toward American society.

An inevitable chain of circumstances worked to turn America's chief romancer into her chief critic. Just as Cooper was being culturally broadened and enriched in Europe, America was becoming less and less a palatable environment for a "man of taste, manners, and education." Just as Cooper was developing enough intellectual maturity to look at his country realistically, Americans were

³⁶Quoted by Outland, p. 93.

developing a decided aversion to criticism. Just as personal excellence, privacy, and the rights of personal property were assuming greater significance for Cooper, his fellow Americans were deciding that "one man is as good as another" and that any belief to the contrary was not only "aristocratic," but probably subversive. Although Cooper continued to consider himself "as good a democrat as any man in America" (AD, p. viii), he had reached a sad conclusion about his country in 1838: the finer feelings are nourished and sustained only with great difficulty in a society such as that spawned by Jacksonian democracy.

CHAPTER VI
SOCIAL AND MORAL SENSIBILITY IN THE
FINAL LEATHERSTOCKING TALES

The Home novels, except for some portions of Home-ward Bound, are "tract" novels. Especially in Home As Found, Cooper shows little concern with the techniques of imaginative literature. He has a message to convey and he sets about conveying it without a great deal of concern about how. Regardless of their lack of literary merit, however, these novels introduce the major changes that Cooper makes in his approach to sensibility. Some of his best novels follow the Home novels, but not one of them is free of the influences introduced in these two novels of social criticism.

Beginning with the Home novels, Cooper shifts his focus to a different kind of enemy. In the early novels, Cooper deals frequently with threats to civilization from without: evil Indian tribes, the French, and the British. If the threat comes from white Americans, their number is small: a wasteful Billy Kirby or a grasping Ishmael Bush. The majority of Americans are willing to be guided by such sensitive leaders as Marmaduke Temple and Duncan Uncas Middleton. In his later fiction, on the other hand, Cooper is nearly always concerned with the threat posed to

civilization by itself. The source of this threat is not the occasional insensitive American; rather it is the democratic mass as that mass evolved in the era of Jacksonian democracy. It manifests itself primarily as a failure of sensibility: in vulgar manners, in the refusal to recognize and abide by social demarcations, in "law-honest," but morally corrupt character, and in allowing greed to supplant respect for landed property, for tradition, for the past--even for human life.

Cooper's last two Leatherstocking tales mirror this concern with civilization's threat to itself from within its very social structure. Criticism, however, has failed to see that The Pathfinder and The Deerslayer comprise not an exception to, but rather an extension of Cooper's social criticism. Thomas R. Lounsbury declares that in these novels "references to contemporary events are so slight that they would pass unheeded by anyone whose attention had not been called before hand to their existence." Lounsbury feels that this return to the Leatherstocking shows "what Cooper was capable of when he was not indulging in lectures on manners and morals."¹ Robert Spiller calls The Pathfinder a "return to pure romance" and cites both this novel and The Deerslayer as "exceptions to Cooper's

¹James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1882), p. 240.

attempts at various forms of the social problem novel."²
 More recently, George Dekker has declared that Cooper's primary reason for writing The Pathfinder was that a return to the Leatherstocking "held out the prospect of a temporary escape from the complicated, infinitely exasperating world of Home As Found."³

As complicated and infinitely exasperating as Jacksonian America was for Cooper, however, he faced it squarely. He was not the man to seek escape, even temporary escape, from his own problems or those of his country. The Pathfinder and The Deerslayer are as much a product of Cooper's reaction to Jacksonian America as the Home novels are.⁴ Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that Cooper could--or at least would--have written either of these novels prior to his return from Europe and his altercations with the American press and his countrymen.⁵ As we have

²Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times (New York: Minton, Balch, and Company, 1931), pp. 237, 269.

³James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1967), p. 163.

⁴Donald Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), pp. 80-90, is perhaps the only Cooper critic who recognizes the social implications of these novels.

⁵In 1831, Cooper wrote to his publishers (Colburn and Bentley) of a novel, the subject to be "Lake Ontario, with scenes on the Great Lakes, with Indians intermingled" (The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper, II (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1960), 53. As Donald Ringe points out (James Fenimore Cooper, pp. 80-81), Cooper would no doubt have written a very different book in 1831 from the one he wrote in 1840.

seen, two major failures of sensibility are explored for the first time in the Home novels: the refusal to recognize and respect class distinctions (in the arrogant assertion by Dodge and Bragg that "one man is as good as another"); and the substitution of the profit motive for nobler aims (in the consuming interest in speculation and profit manifested by the levelers and symbolized in Wall Street). The Pathfinder is shaped by Cooper's negative response to leveling democracy and his conviction that social demarcations are necessary in any society. The Deerslayer is molded by Cooper's distrust of the greedy, mercenary facet of the American character which he found so much in evidence upon his return from abroad.

The themes of the earlier Leatherstocking tales--the desecration of the landscape, the plight of the Indian, the march of civilization--are present in these later novels, but they are subordinate to the depiction of the American character and its failings. Moreover, there is a significant change in these last two Leatherstocking tales in the portrayal of Natty Bumppo. In The Pioneers, The Last of the Mohicans, and The Prairie, Natty is an important character in the "major plot," the thematic aspect of the novel, but not of the "minor plot," the narrative line. One of his primary functions is to exemplify that kind of sensibility which sympathizes with the Indian's plight and intuits the significance of the landscape. In each novel,

there are some persons, usually the genteel hero and heroine, who have the perceptiveness to comprehend what Natty stands for and the means and intelligence to implement those tenets of his philosophy adaptable to "settlement life."

Natty's situation is much changed in The Pathfinder and The Deerslayer: instead of merely moving in a line adjacent to the main action of the plot Natty, both as Pathfinder and as Deerslayer, is as pivotal to the narrative as he is to the theme. In both novels the plot revolves around him: as the Pathfinder, he is a man in love; as the Deerslayer, he is both the courageous hero and the man pursued--albeit unsuccessfully--by a beautiful woman.

Henry Nash Smith contends that Cooper's purpose in elevating Natty to this central position in the later novels is an attempt to remove his most vital character from "a technically inferior position both in the social system and in the form of the sentimental novel."⁶ Natty's social station, however, remains essentially the same. What Cooper achieves by the shift is the underscoring of Natty as the spokesman and the exemplifier of Cooper's own attitudes toward Jacksonian America. They are the same attitudes exhibited by the Effinghams of the

⁶Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 70.

Home novels. Cooper evidently decided to see whether the long-popular Natty Bumppo could voice with impunity the same sentiments that had called down a shower of calumny upon the Effinghams.

Cooper's major concern in The Pathfinder is social decorum: the separation of social classes and individuals on the basis of background, education, manners, and tastes; and the dangers of failing to recognize these distinctions. In the Home novels, the spokesmen for adherence to these demarcations are the Effinghams, who are obviously refined, wealthy, and educated. In The Pathfinder, the major exponent of social decorum is the obviously untutored and still illiterate Natty Bumppo, whose challenge consists of demonstrating enough social sensibility to recognize that Jasper Western and not the Pathfinder is the most suitable husband for Mabel Dunham. Ironically, in the very novel in which Cooper describes Natty as most thoroughly pre-lapsarian--"a sort of type of what Adam might have been supposed to be before the fall,"⁷ Cooper humanizes and socializes him to a greater degree than ever before.

Throughout the Leatherstocking tales, a significant mark of Natty's sensibility is his realization of his "place" and his deference to those who are his social

⁷The Pathfinder, p. 139. This and all subsequent references to Cooper's novels are to The Works of James Fenimore Cooper, Mohawk edition, 33 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

superiors. At the end of The Pioneers, Oliver Effingham, paying tribute to his grandfather and to Natty Bumppo, ends the solemn inscription on his grandfather's grave stone with these words: "His descendants rear this stone to the virtues of the master, and to the enduring gratitude of the servant." Far from resenting being relegated to a social position considerably below that of the Effinghams, Natty breaks into a smile of joy and gratitude: "And did ye say it, lad? have you then got the old man's name cut in the stone, by the side of his master's? God bless ye, children. 'Twas a kind thought, and kindness goes to the heart as life shortens" (p. 472). In The Last of the Mohicans, Hawkeye walks a little behind Duncan and the Munro girls "with a deference to the superior rank of his companions" (p. 355). In The Prairie, the Trapper quickly recognizes that Duncan and Inez Middleton belong to a different social station from that of the other prairie wanderers and approaches them with the same deference he pays to the Munro sisters.

The problem is much more complex in The Pathfinder. In The Last of the Mohicans, Hawkeye, leading Duncan Heyward and the Munro girls through the treacherous forest to meet Colonel Munro at Fort William Henry, sees himself only as the guide and protector of persons obviously his social superiors. Pathfinder, in an opening highly reminiscent of the earlier novel (and set in 1759,

only two years later than the action of Mohicans), again leads a daughter to her father. Like Hawkeye, he is the young lady's protector; and at first glance, he seems to be her social equal also. Mabel Dunham's father, with whom Natty works as a scout, is not an officer in the British service, but rather a sergeant. Cooper calls Mabel "unsophisticated"; indeed, he says she can "scarcely be said to be educated at all" (p. 111). Then, too, Mabel's father not only considers Pathfinder a suitable husband for his daughter, but he has gone so far as to "promise" her to Natty even before the two have met.

Mabel, however, turns out to be a little more socially complex than Natty has anticipated. As a Cooper heroine, her character is, of course, above reproach; her moral perceptiveness is perhaps most clearly indicated in her positive response to the "truth, honesty, simplicity, justice, and courage" (p. 286) of Natty Bumppo. What distinguishes Mabel from Natty is not her moral character, then, but her manners and her interests. While she has not been formally educated into the technical status of a "lady," she has been "taught much more than was usual for young women in her own station of life" (p. 111). At the death of Mabel's mother, the girl was taken in hand by a field officer's wife, from whom she "acquired some tastes, and many ideas, which otherwise might always have remained strangers to her" (pp. 111-12). The result of this early

association is "quite apparent in her attire, her language, her sentiments, and even in her feelings. . . . She had lost the coarser and less refined habits and manners of one in her original position" (p. 112).

Cooper demonstrates Mabel's acquired refinement in several ways. He attributes to her what Henry Nash Smith calls the "infallible index" of "sensibility" in Cooper's upper class characters: she responds sensitively to the landscape.⁸ Natty appreciates the landscape, of course, but his response is the result of his moral perceptiveness: he views the wilderness as the handiwork of God. While Mabel shares Natty's moral perception, there is another dimension to her appreciation of the landscape: the aesthetic. Cooper specifically attributes this sensibility in Mabel to her acquired tastes:

With such antecedents, it will occasion the reader no wonder if he learn that Mabel viewed the novel scene before her with a pleasure far superior to that produced by vulgar surprise. She felt its ordinary beauties as most would have felt them, but she had also a feeling for its sublimity; for that softened solitude, that calm grandeur and eloquent objects which are yet undisturbed by the labors and struggles of man. (p. 112)

Further evidence of Mabel's superiority to the class into which she was born is her ability to repeat at her father's deathbed the liturgical prayers of the Episcopal faith. Although Cooper does not specifically name the

⁸Virgin Land, p. 72.

denomination, there is little doubt that he is attributing to Mabel the kind of religious training characteristic of his genteel heroes and heroines:

The sect in which she had been reared, has furnished to its followers some of the most beautiful compositions of the language, as a suitable vehicle for its devotion and solicitations. . . . Her taste had become improved by its study, and her language elevated and enriched by its phrases. In short, Mabel, in this respect, was an instance of the influence and familiarity with propriety of thought, fitness of language, and decorum of manner, on the habits and expressions of even those who might be supposed not to be always so susceptible of receiving high impressions of this nature. (pp. 471-72)

Cooper obviously intends to emphasize Mabel's cultural refinement as much as her pious character. He goes so far as to compare the holy enthusiasm of her face to a picture by Guido.

Pathfinder, whose moral character can bear the closest scrutiny, has declined saying the prayers for Sergeant Dunham, realizing that he lacks the poise and the training for public recitation. In each of the earlier Leatherstocking tales, Natty is impressed by the devoutness and the moral sensibility of the heroines. He is moved by the piety of these ladies, but he is not disturbed by the differences between his mode of worship and theirs. They represent, after all, a social class and a way of life distinct from his own. As he listens to Mabel's recitation, however, he is not only profoundly moved but evidently disturbed as well (p. 473). The incident is simply one

more indication to Pathfinder that, despite the circumstances of Mabel's birth, a social chasm separates them.

The officers' wives, although they are aware of their own superior rank, are particularly impressed by Mabel's modest self-respect and gentle refinement (p. 161). Mabel herself recognizes that her background has placed her in a peculiar social position. She tells Jasper Western: "I am in an awkward position, for while I am not good enough to be the wife of one of the gentlemen of the garrison, I think even you will admit, Jasper, I am too good to be the wife of one of the common soldiers" (p. 226). Socially, Natty Bumppo cannot help but fall into this latter category. The lower class has been his social station in the first three Leatherstocking tales, and Cooper does not promote him out of it in The Pathfinder. The plot and the theme of The Pathfinder turn upon Natty's ability to recognize and accept the social distinctions between himself and Mabel.

As a matter of fact, Natty has misgivings about the propriety of the match soon after he meets Mabel. When he expresses his doubts to Mabel's father, Sergeant Dunham suspects some dissatisfaction with his daughter. Pathfinder's answers are revelatory:

"It is not Mabel that I distrust, but myself. I am a poor ignorant woodsman, after all, and perhaps I'm not, in truth, as good as even you and I may think me! . . . I'm afeard I'm too rude, and too old,

and too wild like to suit the fancy of such a young and delicate girl as Mabel, who has been unused to our wilderness ways, and may think the settlements better suited to her gifts and inclinations. . . . I have traveled with some as fair, and have guided them through the forest . . . but they were always too much above me to make me think of them as more than so many feeble ones I was bound to protect and defend. The case is now different. Mabel and I are so nearly alike, that I feel weighed down with a load that is hard to bear, at finding us so unlike. . . . I am but a poor hunter, and Mabel, I see, is fit to be an officer's wife." (pp. 134, 135, 136)

Nowhere is this dissimilarity so clear as when Pathfinder first confronts Mabel with his feelings. She is so taken aback by the idea that she cannot help but declare that "a match like that would be unwise--unnatural perhaps" (p. 287). Even her attempt to be kind to Natty underscores her intellectual superiority: when she tries to express with delicacy their unsuitableness for each other, her vocabulary is beyond Pathfinder's understanding and he can only ask in wonder "Anan?"--in his peculiar but characteristic manner of expressing incomprehension. At this encounter, Natty begins to realize that he has "indeed been on a false trail since [they] met" (p. 288). He allows Mabel's father, however, to lull him into believing that Mabel's hesitancy is the result of her modesty.

The true test of Natty's social sensibility--that is, his ability to recognize and accept distinctions in tastes and refinement--comes when Natty, realizing that Jasper Western loves Mabel, is forced to compare himself with Jasper as a candidate for Mabel's hand. With his

characteristic fairness and candor, Natty insists upon enumerating for Mabel the relative merits of himself and Jasper. He will defer to no man in his honesty, the depth of his love for Mabel, and his ability to provide for a wife. It is a mark of his moral imagination, however, that he is willing to concede that "when all is remembered, age, looks, l'arning, and habits, Mabel, conscience tells me I ought to confess that I'm altogether unfit for you" (p. 487). He not only concedes that Jasper is his equal in all the positive qualities he has attributed to himself, but he also insists that Jasper possesses important distinctions: "He is quite a scholar--knows the tongue of the Frenchers--reads many books, and some, I know, that you like to read yourself--can understand you at all times, which, perhaps, is more than I can say for myself. . . . Then the lad has a manner of letting his thoughts be known, that I fear I can never equal" (p. 488).

Cooper has made clear to the reader throughout the novel the distinctions that Natty comes to recognize between himself and Jasper Western. From the beginning of the story, there is a social finesse in Jasper's relationship with Mabel that is totally lacking in Natty's interactions with her. While Natty is blunt and straightforward in telling Mabel of his love for her (p. 285), Jasper is hesitant and reserved, not because he does not feel deeply, but because he recognizes that propriety

demands a certain sensitivity of approach in romance (p. 226). His solicitous attention to Mabel's comfort is that of a gentleman, while Natty's is typical of a guide and protector.

In addition, Jasper realizes, as Natty does not, the ritualistic significance of being able to present Mabel with the calash, the prize awarded the best marksman in a shooting contest. The chivalrous character of the event completely eludes Pathfinder: he allows Jasper to win because of his affection for the youth and he tells Mabel what he has done because of his reluctance to let her think anybody could outdo him with the rifle. Even Mabel realizes the impropriety of Natty's revelation. She turns pale until Natty assures her that Jasper was unaware of the scout's magnanimity. Jasper is never guilty of Natty's ill-advised candor; as much as he loves Mabel, he is careful never to reveal his feelings until forced to do so by Natty. Thus while Jasper does not surpass Natty in moral sensibility, he is clearly the scout's superior in social refinement.

Another indication that Cooper wishes to emphasize Jasper's superiority as a candidate for Mabel's hand is the amount of space devoted to the young man's expertise as a sailor. In the other Leatherstocking tales, it is Natty's skill as a woodsman and hunter which occupies the limelight; in The Pathfinder, Natty's wilderness

accomplishments are subordinated to his role as a social commentator. Rather it is Jasper's skill as a sailor that is put to the test. Sergeant Dunham, yielding to the machinations of Lt. Muir and the suspicions of his seaman brother-in-law, Cap, arrests Jasper and puts Cap in charge of the Scud on Lake Otsego. When Cap steers the boat into a potentially catastrophic situation, only the sailing ability of Jasper extricates the ship and saves the lives of those on board. As he has done in earlier novels, Cooper here equates the profession of sailing with a certain amount of refinement of moral character--just as Jasper's seamanship is found to be faultless, so his character is revealed to be blameless.

The third member of this social triangle is the quartermaster, Lt. Muir. Obviously higher in social station than Natty and Jasper, Muir nevertheless is their inferior in both social and moral sensibility. Having been married to three women of his own social station and illicitly involved with a gardener's daughter, Muir takes a fancy to Mabel Dunham. His friend and commanding officer, Major Dundie, tries to explain to him the error of choosing a wife from a lower social level, but Muir, infatuated with Mabel's beauty, turns a deaf ear to the Major's advice (p. 153).

Muir's behavior toward Mabel stands in stark contrast to Jasper's even though the lieutenant's social

class and his background should give him a social advantage over the young sailor. While Jasper's approach to Mabel is marked with a delicacy and propriety that not even Natty can equal, Muir behaves toward Mabel in an improper and cavalier fashion completely alien to Cooper gentlemen. He addresses her by such epithets as "pretty Mabel" and "beautiful Mabel," the kind of familiarity which Cooper attacks with a vengeance in Aristabulus Bragg and Jason Newcome. His compliments, like his addresses, are so familiar and inopportune that they elicit from Mabel a more spirited repulse than Cooper's heroines generally employ. Muir tells Mabel that if she will consent to be the fourth Mrs. Muir, all the others will be forgotten, since Mabel's "wonderful beauty and merit" would elevate her to be first. Mabel's retort would humiliate a less insensitive man: "I confess I should prefer being even a fourth rate beauty to being a fourth wife" (p. 316).

Just as Muir lacks the social sensibility of Jasper Western, so he is woefully deficient in the moral sensibility of Natty Bumppo. Once he realizes how Jasper and Mabel feel toward each other, Natty puts his own feelings completely aside and devotes himself to uniting the lovers. Muir, on the other hand, maliciously seeks to discredit both Jasper and Natty to Mabel, and Mabel to Natty. When Muir lies to Natty about Mabel's opinion of him and advises Natty to return to the forest in order to mortify Mabel,

Natty replies simply: "The last wish I have, Lieutenant, would be to mortify Mabel" (p. 319). Muir's failure to honor either social demarcations or moral codes serves two functions: it places him in sharp contrast to Natty and Jasper; and it establishes him as the forerunner of the social levelers of Cooper's later novels.

Muir's failure of sensibility results from his refusal to be guided by the "gifts" characteristic of one in his social position. In The Pathfinder, Cooper begins to apply this term to cultural attributes. Natty, following his decision to relinquish Mabel to Jasper, tells her: "I have always known, Mabel Dunham, that men have their gifts, but I'd forgotten that it did not belong to mine, to please the young, beautiful, and l'arned" (p. 49). This application of the word "gifts" to learned behavior represents a shift from Cooper's earlier use of the term. He does not use the word at all in The Pioneers, but in The Last of the Mohicans, "gifts" is introduced to explain innate, or hereditary distinctions among racial groups: the Indians have the gift of scalping, of vengeance, of expertness with the tomahawk; the whites of forgiveness and marksmanship, for example. The "gift psychology" not only enables Natty to explain his own behavior, but it also helps him to justify qualities in the noble Chingachgook which might otherwise seem reprehensible. The "doctrine of gifts" is used in the same way in The Prairie.

In the last two Leatherstocking tales, however, the word not only occurs much more frequently,⁹ but it also comes to serve as the explanation for cultural and social differences among individuals and groups. The shift is so obvious that Cooper feels the necessity of formulating a theory of gifts in The Deerslayer. Natty tells Judith Hutter:

Now gifts come from sarcumstances. Thus, if you put a man in a town, he gets town gifts; in a settlement, settlement gifts; in a forest, gifts of the woods. . . . All these increase and strengthen, until they get to fortify natur' as it might be, and excuse a thousand acts and ideas. . . . Herein lies the apology for gifts; seein' that you expect different conduct from one in silks, and satins, from one in homespun. (p. 455)

There is little about Cooper's use of "gifts" in The Last of the Mohicans and The Prairie to suggest this connection with manners and social customs. There can be little doubt that this re-evaluation and redefinition of the doctrine of gifts reflect Cooper's disturbed response to leveling democracy in Jacksonian America.

What Natty comes to realize in The Pathfinder is that there is a wide difference between his forest gifts and the gifts acquired by Mabel through her contact with a higher social class. Although there are other actions

⁹Charles Boewe, "Cooper's Doctrine of Gifts," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 7 (1962), 27-35, has discovered that Cooper uses the term "gifts" twice as many times in the last two Leatherstocking tales as he does in Last of the Mohicans and The Prairie. Boewe interprets this increase in the use as a change from a heredity-centered to an environment-centered view of man.

in the novel, it is this demonstration of Natty Bumppo's sensibility which comprises the major plot. A part of that sensibility is, as D. H. Lawrence suggests, Natty's realization that his mission lies not in marriage and the settlement, but in the forest.¹⁰ On two occasions, Natty admits that Mabel's influence may make him untrue to his gifts as a woodsman and a hunter (pp. 199, 292).

Cooper's primary message in The Pathfinder, however, is not that the mythical, Adamic Leatherstocking must remain celibate; his major point is that Natty Bumppo, the rude, untutored backwoodsman--despite his moral superiority--is not a suitable husband for the delicate, refined Mabel Dunham. If Cooper were concerned only with Pathfinder's "truth to his vocation," as George Dekker suggests,¹¹ then Natty's relationship with Chingachgook, who represents the non-settlement aspect of Natty's life, would be a focal point in the story. The fact is, however, that in The Pathfinder, Chingachgook is more recessive and more peripheral to the major concerns of the novel than in either The Pioneers or Last of the Mohicans.¹²

¹⁰Studies in Classic American Literature (1923; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 59.

¹¹James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott, p. 163.

¹²In The Prairie, Chingachgook does not appear at all, of course, since the action of this novel, portraying Natty's last days, is subsequent to that of The Pioneers, in which the Indian dies.

The change of setting and the depiction of humbler characters in The Pathfinder protected Cooper against charges of portraying himself and his family in his fiction. The return to Leatherstocking did not, however, prohibit Cooper from warning the Americans of his own day that irresponsible crossing of class lines constitutes a dangerous failure of sensibility. For the first time, he uses Natty Bumppo to demonstrate that class lines are necessary because differences in background, training, and education result in different "gifts" and the gifts of a wilderness scout are not the gifts of a refined girl of the settlement.

In The Deerslayer (1841), Natty Bumppo is once again involved in an affair of the heart, but this time he is the pursued rather than the pursuer. In the later novel, it is the moral unfitness of the heroine, and not her social superiority, which makes her an unsuitable companion for Natty. In this final Leatherstocking tale Cooper points up the failure of his countrymen to profit by the beneficent influence of the American landscape. He demonstrates this failure of sensibility by juxtaposing Natty Bumppo (who symbolizes what America might have become by 1840) with Tom and Judith Hutter and Hurry Harry March (who represent what America had become by 1840). The novel is set on the Glimmerglass (Lake Otsego) in the 1740's, during an outbreak of fighting between the English and the

French, but the representatives of civilization and the settlement are unmistakably of Cooper's own day.

The American wilderness offered to the pioneer the opportunity to begin afresh. It was not a safe environment by any means, but it was, initially at least, unsullied by the man-made excesses and shortcomings of the old world. One of Natty Bumppo's constant texts throughout the Leatherstocking tales is man's relationship to that wilderness. In the first three tales, especially The Pioneers and The Prairie, Natty concentrates on man's desecration of the landscape. In The Deerslayer, his emphasis is on the failure of Americans to respond to the positive moral influences of that landscape. Natty touches upon this subject several times in The Pathfinder; at one point, he tells Mabel Dunham: "The garrison churches never could raise within me the solemn feelings and true affections that I feel when alone with God in the forest. There I seem to stand face to face with my master, all around me is fresh and beautiful, as it came from his hand, and there is no nicety of doctrine to chill the feelin's. No, no: the woods are the true temple, a'ter all" (p. 92). In The Pathfinder, as in the earlier Leatherstocking tales, there are Americans--like Mabel Dunham and Jasper Western--who share Natty's appreciation of the landscape.

In The Deerslayer, however, Natty's moral sensibility sets him apart from all the other white persons in the

novel. The moral insensitivity and greed of the white Americans Natty meets recall not the earlier Leatherstocking tales, but rather the recent Home novels. In order to emphasize how far short of the ideal the typical American of the 1840's has fallen, Cooper makes Natty Bumppo far more mythical in The Deerslayer than he is in the earlier tales. As Deerslayer, Natty seems most completely a creature of the forest, almost mystically absorbing and apprehending the spirit of the wilderness. When Judith Hutter asks Deerslayer about his sweetheart, he replies dreamily, "She's in the forest, Judith--hanging from the boughs of the trees, in a soft rain--in the dew on the open grass--the clouds that float about in the blue heavens, the birds that sing in the woods--the sweet springs where I slake my thirst--and in all the other glorious gifts that come from God's Providence!" (p. 132). Deerslayer, much more than Pathfinder, is the true Adam, struck by the discovery of a new world and absorbed in names and naming--of himself as well as lakes and rocks.

There is another dimension to Deerslayer besides the Adamic: he is the beau ideal of the American pioneer. In him the necessary ingredients converge to fulfill the promise of America: he is the saint with the gun that never misses. He declares that the golden rule of the forest is "Do lest ye be done by"--yet he remains to ease the dying of the Indian who is his first human victim. He

does not hesitate to split a Huron's skull with an axe-- yet he keeps his word to this man's tribe, returning to captivity (and what would seem certain death) after his "furlough."

Against this uncanny combination of prudential morality and supra-moral saintliness, all the other white characters in the novel must be measured. Hetty Hutter, the simple-minded daughter of Tom Hutter, comes closest to Natty in saintliness. Like his, her best actions-- like her trip into the Huron camp to plead for the lives of her father and Hurry--are the product of intuition rather than reason. Even the Hurons respect her spirituality. Nevertheless, Hetty's simple-minded purity is dangerously inadequate in an imperfect world. It allows her to recognize the good in Deerslayer, but it does not equip her to recognize the depth of the evil in Hurry Harry. His handsome exterior is too appealing; she dies groping for his hand, unable to withstand the "secret yielding to the instincts of nature" (p. 558).

Deerslayer, on the other hand, possesses the moral perception that Hetty lacks. For all his attraction to Judith Hutter, he realizes that her contact with civilization has distorted her moral sensibilities. Whatever good intentions prompt Judith's marriage proposal to Deerslayer, they are not sufficient to bring about a permanent alteration in her character.

For Judith, the officers and the glitter of the garrisons have exerted a stronger pull than the instructive beauties of the landscape. Even before Deerslayer meets Judith, Hurry Harry hints at her lapses. Deerslayer, gazing in wonder on the beauties of the wilderness, declares, "Harry, your Judith ought to be a moral and well-disposed young woman, if she has passed half the time you mention in the center of a spot so favored" (p. 32). Tom Hutter, however, has taken his daughters to the settlement for their winters, and Judith's sensibilities have been so thwarted by contact with corrupted civilization as to render her unreceptive to the benefits of the morally therapeutic American landscape. Judith Hutter is one of Cooper's best-drawn heroines; her natural grace and refinement combined with a passionate nature give her a complexity often lacking in Cooper's heroines. Yet, even though her relationship with Natty reawakens her moral sensibility, she leaves the Glimmerglass to become the mistress of Captain Warley.

An equally serious failure of sensibility is demonstrated in Tom Hutter and Hurry Harry, a new breed of American character barely foreshadowed in the earlier Leatherstocking tales. These two men represent the self-centered greed which Cooper found rampant on his return to America after seven years in Europe. Tom Hutter, a former pirate, is not the real father of Hetty and Judith.

He took the girls and their mother--whose character, like Judith's, is not spotless--to his cabin on the Glimmerglass to escape the reach of the law. Although he uses the girls to enlist the aid of Hurry and Deerslayer, his real motive is greed: he does not hesitate to endanger their lives when he sees the opportunity of taking scalps for bounty.

This failure of a parent, adoptive father though he is, to accept responsibility for his children is a new theme to the Leatherstocking tales. In fact, the plots of the first three Leatherstocking tales turn upon attempts to reunite families separated by external circumstances. In The Pioneers, Oliver Effingham and Leatherstocking devote themselves to effecting the restoration of the Effingham fortunes to Oliver and his grandfather. In The Last of the Mohicans, the entire plot consists of an attempt by Hawkeye and Duncan Heyward to reunite the Munro girls with their father and later to deliver them from capture by the Indians. In The Prairie, Duncan Uncas Middleton and the Trapper spend a good portion of the novel retrieving Duncan's wife, Inez, from her kidnapper, Abiram White.

In The Deerslayer family feeling, which Cooper has established as a strong indicator of moral sensibility in the earlier Leatherstocking tales, is corrupted and exploited. The absence of family protection and stability results in the moral degeneration of Judith and the death

of Hetty. Natty Bumppo, who has known the girls scarcely twenty-four hours, is the only white character in the novel who demonstrates any real interest in their safety and welfare. Even more than Judith, Tom Hutter has remained immune to the moral tutelage of his surroundings.

It is in Harry March that Cooper creates his supreme negative example of the American character. Harry has the strength and the physical attractiveness that Cooper often notes as peculiar to Americans, but he has also the restless, speculative spirit which Cooper found all too characteristic of Americans of the 1840's. His approach to life is that of a gambler; his initial reaction to any situation is to assess the odds in an attempt to predict the likelihood of getting what he wants or escaping harm to himself. He can be volatile and emotional, but when the issue is personal, it is cold logic that directs him: he decides that Judith's beauty is sufficient to offset past indiscretions, that the homely Deerslayer is no rival, that he can murder Judith's hypothetical husband with impunity-- "when we live beyond law, we must be our own judges and executioners" (p. 13). He has little patience with Deerslayer's pauses to exclaim on the beauties of their surroundings. The forest, says Natty, "is an edication of itself to look upon" (p. 21), but Harry is too self-absorbed to be schooled by natural wonders.

Donald Davie accuses Cooper of failing to make the character of Harry as rich and comprehensive as he makes that of Leatherstocking.¹³ George Dekker echoes this opinion and adds that Harry lacks the stature of Billy Kirby of The Pioneers--that Harry is "not sufficiently mythical."¹⁴ Cooper knows what he is about, however. Hurry Harry March lacks the mythical magnitude of Billy Kirby and Ishmael Bush as a character because he lacks their substance as a man. Billy Kirby misuses the land and he sadly miscalculates the extent of its bounty, but he never really loses contact with the land. He knows instinctively that Leatherstocking's tie to the land supersedes hunting-season technicalities. Exploiter of the land though he is, Ismael Bush serves at least as a kind of advance guard to open the land for further settlement.

Hurry Harry March has no such contact with the land; in fact, as he and Deerslayer proceed toward the Glimmer-glass, they might as well be moving in total darkness as far as Harry is concerned. He sees none of the beauty; he feels none of the "soothing of the spirit which is a common attendant of a scene so thoroughly pervaded by the holy calm of nature" (p. 33). He shares with Deerslayer none

¹³The Heyday of Walter Scott (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 126.

¹⁴James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott, p. 177.

of the moral sensibility, the almost holy reverence which natural beauties elicit from the woodsman.

In Hurry Harry, sensitivity to the moral instruction of the landscape has been so blunted by the inherent evils of civilization that he has even lost respect for human life. His random careless firing at a buck is merely a prelude to his shooting a Huron girl in "that spirit of recklessness and ferocity that formed the essence of his character" (p. 328). Even Chingachgook's betrothed, Wah-ta!-Wah, who does not flinch at Indian "gifts" of fighting and scalping, realizes the utter inhumanity of Hurry's act: "You big as great pine--Huron gal little slender birch--why you fall on her and crush her? Why you so wicked, great paleface?" (p. 329).

Harry's bigotry is not softened by even a modicum of regard for his fellow creatures. He tells Deerslayer, "As for scalping, or even skinning a savage, I look upon them pretty much the same as cutting off the ears of wolves for bounty, or stripping a bear of its hide" (p. 36). Almost completely amoral, Hurry Harry March operates by a rationalization that is deadly: he excuses murder by insisting that his victim is an animal rather than a human being. It is this same kind of disregard for the welfare of his fellow creatures that prompts Harry to abandon the Hutter girls and Deerslayer to their fate when he no longer sees any possibility of gaining either Judith or Huron

scalps. He halfheartedly promises to send help from the garrison, but the soldiers are on their way, summoned by the sound of a shot which Deerslayer fires from Killdeer, the famous rifle Judith gives him.

Of Cooper's critics, perhaps only Marius Bewley has seen how much of the insensitivity of the American character Cooper meant to portray in *Hurry Harry March*:

In Harry and his moral vision of life we have an early representative of a type that was to become a dominant element in American civilization as it moved towards the Gilded Age--a type that could supplant moral motives by motives of commercial expedience, and pretend, even to itself, that the substitution had never been made.¹⁵

Hurry Harry's failure of sensibility must be measured against Deerslayer's philosophy of universal brotherhood. Cooper never even comes close to advocating assimilation of the Indian and the white man, but he clearly demonstrates that one of the most positive manifestations of Deerslayer's integrity is his respect for the dignity of all human beings, regardless of their "gifts." Natty's answers to Harry's arrogant contention that the Indian is a subhuman species are morally irrefutable (Chap. 1). When Hutter and March automatically assume that Natty will make one of the scalping party, he declares, "I'll not unhumanize my natur' by falling into ways that God intended for another race" (p. 75).

¹⁵The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959), p. 95.

In all the other Leatherstocking tales, Cooper includes a hero and heroine who possess enough moral sensibility to comprehend and profit by Natty's example: Oliver and Elizabeth Effingham in The Pioneers; Duncan Heyward and Alice Munro in The Last of the Mohicans; Duncan and Inez Middleton in The Prairie; and Jasper Western and Mabel Dunham in The Pathfinder. In The Deerslayer, however, there is no such couple. Harry and Judith are both seriously flawed and thus cannot fill the role of those earlier heroes and heroines. Judith is obviously no proper mate for Deerslayer: the saint cannot accept the fallen woman. Besides, Deerslayer, "mythicized" almost beyond the reach of social and economic concerns, is properly understood only as a creature of the forest, not as a surrogate genteel hero.

What Cooper does in this final Leatherstocking tale is to replace the typical hero and heroine of the romantic novel with the Indian lovers, Chingachgook and Wah-tah!-Wah. Despite the fact that many of their Indian gifts would be morally unacceptable in the white world, this Indian pair display the integrity, loyalty, and sensitivity that have previously been characteristic of Cooper's genteel hero and heroine. They not only help to protect and defend the Hutter girls (a task that Harry is too caught up in his greed to perform), but they also decide that trying to save Deerslayer's life is more

important than their own safety (a selfless decision completely beyond the reach of Harry).

Like Deerslayer's, Chingachgook's moral sensibilities have been shaped by his close communion with nature. David Brion Davis has noted that the most dramatic incidents in the novel, those involving Deerslayer and Chingachgook, take place at sunrise, thus "uniting the physical, moral, and aesthetic senses with nature" and "relating physical prowess to moral perfection and an appreciation for beauty."¹⁶ Hutter and Harry, both morally and aesthetically blind to the wonders of nature, perform their evil deeds under the cover of darkness. The peculiar relationship of Deerslayer and Chingachgook to nature lends a sanctity even to their acts of violence. Critics have often noted the ritualistic, almost spiritualized character of Natty's killing of his first Indian. In defending himself against his lone Indian assailant and his Huron captors, Deerslayer seems to be moving with the rhythms of nature, while Hutter and March, killing only from greed, move contrary to nature's laws.

The displacement of the genteel representatives of civilization by a hero and heroine from a race which by 1840 had been essentially annihilated by that civilization

¹⁶"The Deerslayer: A Democratic Knight of the Wilderness: Cooper, 1841," Twelve Original Essays on Great American Novels, ed. Charles Shapiro (Detroit: Wayne Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 13-14.

is perhaps Cooper's bitterest comment on America. The substitution is especially poignant in this last of the Leatherstocking tales because Cooper's reader knows the future already: fifteen years after the major events of the novel, Wah-ta!-Wah will be dead; in twenty years, Uncas will die, the last of the Mohicans; in fifty years this same noble Chingachgook will die a poor, broken, drunken Indian called John Mohegan; and in sixty-five years, Natty Bumppo will die, pushed by civilization to the farthest extremes of the American frontier. Each death represents the end of a line and the end of a positive way of life. Not one of these morally perceptive individuals leaves behind him a replacement. The Leatherstocking series may be, as D. H. Lawrence suggests, the myth of America shedding her old and wrinkled skin.¹⁷ When we consider, however, what The Deerslayer is saying about the failure of sensibility in the America of the 1840's, there is little optimistic promise in Cooper's running the fictional reel backwards.

¹⁷Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 54. Lawrence suggests that the novels be read in the order Cooper wrote them (Pioneers, Mohicans, Prairie, Pathfinder, Deerslayer): "a decrescendo of reality, and a crescendo of beauty."

CHAPTER VII

THE DECLINE OF SENSIBILITY

The Deerslayer marks the end of Cooper's fictional use of Natty Bumppo. From the standpoint of myth, Cooper has taken the character about as far as he can--any further exploration of his background might destroy the kind of mystery that makes myth possible. Then, too, Cooper has utilized both Pathfinder and Deerslayer as cogent commentators on his own time; and since by the 1840's such commentary is his primary interest, Cooper is ready to search for new settings in which to make it.

The novels that follow these last two Leatherstocking tales reflect the same interests, but they are marked by significant changes also. Never again does Cooper draw a white man as unreservedly good as Natty Bumppo or an Indian as unequivocally noble as Chingachgook. All of Cooper's subsequent heroes demonstrate human weaknesses and none of his Indians is without blemish--not even Susquesus of the Littlepage trilogy, though he comes closest to Chingachgook, Uncas, and Conanchet.

Cooper grows increasingly strident in his criticism of America's failure of sensibility. His auctorial commentary on his countrymen's shortcomings increases in volume and acerbity; and, like the Effinghams of the Home novels,

his upper class characters are more critical than tolerant of their fellow Americans. In the condescension and intolerance of the Littlepages, there is more of the cynical John Effingham than of the generous-minded Marmaduke Temple. Additionally, these later heroes, while professedly more democratic in politics, are obviously more aristocratic in taste and in their penchant for exclusiveness. They talk more about morality than Cooper's earlier heroes, but they seldom display the kind of moral imagination that characterizes Duncan Heyward or Peyton Dunwoodie.

Yet these people, the Willoughbys of Wyandotté and the Littlepages of the anti-rent trilogy, are those in whom lay America's only hope--at least in Cooper's view. They comprise the remaining remnant of the rapidly dwindling aristocracy of worth. In his fiction, Cooper guards their rights of property and their rights of privacy as jealously as he guarded his own in real life. If they lack the graciousness of their fictional prototypes, it may be because they face an enemy from within their own ranks, from within the very structure of American society--a far more dangerous enemy than the French, the British, or even hostile Indian tribes.

Wyandotté (1842) acts as a bridge between the last two Leatherstocking tales and the anti-rent trilogy. Cooper retains the wilderness setting of The Deerslayer, but in Wyandotté the representative of civilization is the conscientious, upright Captain Willoughby, rather than the

skulking pirate, Tom Hutter. The action of the novel covers thirty years, focusing on three major events during this period. The process of locating and establishing the Huttet Knoll, the Willoughby estate, in 1765; the effect on the community of the Revolutionary War in 1775 and 1776; and the survivors' return to the Knoll in 1795. Such a setting and such a chronology permit Cooper to explore several of his favorite themes: the Indian's response to civilization; patriotism; and the insidious encroachment of demagoguery in America.

Wyandotté, the ousted Tuscarora chief who has served with Captain Willoughby in the French and Indian War under the sobriquet of "Saucy Nick," is a startling change from the statuesque and noble Chingachgook of The Deerslayer. So far from possessing the grace and beauty of Cooper's young Indian braves, the middle-aged Wyandotté appears at the beginning of the story with his face painted half red and half black. The red symbolizes the glory of Chief Wyandotté while the black suggests the evil nature of Saucy Nick. The Indian explains his own psychology: "Nick always dry; Wyandotté knows no thirst. Nick beggar; ask for rum-- pray for rum--t'ink of rum--talk of rum--laugh for rum--cry for rum. Wyandotté don't know rum when he see him. Wyandotté beg not'n, no, not his scalp."¹

¹Wyandotté, or The Huttet Knoll, p. 304. This and all subsequent references to Cooper's novels are to The Works of James Fenimore Cooper, Mohawk edition, 33 vols.

Wyandotté is perhaps Cooper's most complex Indian. There is something almost supernatural in his ubiquity: he will suddenly materialize out of the wilderness and just as suddenly dissolve back into it; and there is always the suggestion that his unexplained absences betoken some dark intrigue. At the same time, Wyandotté is fiercely loyal where he considers his loyalty merited. In addition, he is exceedingly sensitive and perceptive. He is the only character in the novel who perceives the heroine's love for the hero, but he has the innate decency never to betray the knowledge.

Cooper, embittered by the kind of insensitive manners he found common in America upon his return from Europe, declares that Nick has "fathomed the depths of Maud's heart. . . . Had Nick been a pale-face, of the class of those with whom he usually associated, his discovery would have gone through the settlement, with scoffings and exaggerations; but this forest gentleman, for such was Wyandotté, in spite of his degradation and numerous failings, had too much consideration to make a woman's affections the subject of his coarseness and merriment" (pp. 309-10). Just as Cooper has employed Natty and Chingachgook to point up American failure of sensibility

(New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

in the final Leatherstocking tales, so he does not hesitate to make the same use of a renegade Indian.

The Tuscarora can be clever and shrewd, but it is feeling and not reason which directs his major actions in the novel. He never forgets that Mrs. Willoughby saved his life when he had smallpox; when the Knoll is attacked by American irregulars and Mohawks, Wyandotté fiercely defends the Willoughby women against death and mutilation. By the same token, the Indian never forgives an insult: when Captain Willoughby tries to insure Nick's loyalty in the siege by threatening to flog him as he had done in the military, the Indian stabs him to death.

In Cooper's earlier fiction the white man meets the Indian on the red man's own ground, the wilderness. The kind of sensibility required of the white man is his sympathy for the Indian's plight as a displaced, even vanishing American. In Wyandotté, however, the Indian has joined the white man's society and must be perceived and appreciated as a human being with feelings and sensitivities. Captain Willoughby fails to accept Wyandotté on these terms, however. He throws the Indian an occasional dollar, but ignores the fact that Wyandotté does not pick up the money. He insists upon reminding Nick of his earlier floggings, although Nick warns him that it is bad enough to flog, but worse "to put finger on old sore" (p. 301).

For all his failure of sensibility in dealing with Wyandotté, Captain Willoughby is treated sympathetically by Cooper. This sympathetic treatment represents the kind of about-face in Cooper's presentation of patriotism that we have already noted in the Home novels. Cooper's attitude toward patriotism in Wyandotté is much more subtle and complex, however, than it is in the Home novels.

The shift in Cooper's approach to patriotism is set in the boldest relief by juxtaposing this 1843 novel with The Spy (1821), Cooper's second novel. There are obvious parallels in the settings and major actions of the two novels: both are set in the period of the Revolutionary War in "neutral" areas; in both, the principal families are divided in their political allegiances, with some members loyal to the crown and others to the colonies; in each novel one daughter is in love with an officer of the American forces, the other with an officer in the British forces. Most significantly, in both novels the father of the family is uncommitted to either side in the war.

These parallels could hardly have been accidental. The effect of such juxtaposition is to set in dramatic relief Cooper's shifting attitude toward patriotism. In The Spy--and, indeed, in The Pilot, Lionel Lincoln, The Red Rover, and The Water Witch--Cooper portrays the sentiment of patriotism as one of the highest manifestations of sensibility. His most thoroughgoing patriots--Harvey Birch,

the Pilot, Ralph in Lionel Lincoln, the Rover, and Tom Tiller of Water Witch--deliver impassioned speeches on the glory of America. The genteel heroes (like Peyton Dunwoodie of The Spy and Captain Griffiths of The Pilot) are selfless patriots in whom love of country takes precedence over all personal concerns.

In Wyandotté there is no revolutionary hero, no patriot with the selflessness and the moral imagination of Harvey Birch. There is no genteel hero who is so certain and so enamored of the rightness of America's cause that he is willing to hazard all in her defense. Evert Beekman, the American officer who might have fulfilled the role, is a minor character, who marries not the heroine but her sister. Cooper gives only brief attention to his death in battle.

The hero, Robert Willoughby, is an officer with the British forces, but even that loyalty lacks the strength of allegiances in the earlier novels. When most of his family members are killed in the Indian attack, Robert and his wife (he marries his foster sister, Maud Meredith) go to England, returning after twenty years to inspect the Huttet Knoll. Nor is Robert wholly committed to England. He confesses to Maud his misgivings about the justice of the cause he is fighting for. When she asks why he does not change his loyalties, he replies:

I would in a minute if I knew where to find a better.
Rely on it, dearest Maud, all causes are alike in this

particular; though one side may employ instruments, as in the case of the savages; that the other side finds it its interest to decry. Men, as individuals, may be, and sometimes are, reasonably upright--but bodies of men, I much fear, never. The latter escape responsibility by dividing it. (p. 239)

In The Spy or Red Rover, such statements would constitute political blasphemy; in 1843 Cooper can present these reservations with no suggestion of criticism for the speaker. As John P. McWilliams points out: "During the eighteen years between Lionel Lincoln (1825) and Wyandotté (1843), Cooper's patriotism had in no way abated, but the visible and present justifications for patriotism had nearly disappeared."²

By far the most direct evidence of the change in Cooper's attitude toward patriotism lies in the character of Captain Willoughby, obviously a complete recasting of Mr. Wharton of The Spy. Both men have taken up residence in a kind of neutral ground, but their motives are entirely different. Mr. Wharton has moved from New York to Westchester in order to protect his holdings while hypocritically pretending some allegiance to both sides. Captain Willoughby, on the other hand, has come to the wilderness for the positive and honorable purpose of extending civilization into the wilderness.

Neither man has committed himself to a position of allegiance in the Revolution, but again, it is motive that

²Political Justice in a Republic: James Fenimore Cooper's America (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), p. 85.

counts. Wharton's vacillation is selfish, self-centered, and thoroughly malignant. His motive is neither political nor altruistic; it is economic--he wants to protect his property. Willoughby's refusal to commit himself, on the other hand, is the result of genuine doubts. He has the sagacity to realize that each side has legitimate grievances as well as positive elements. He shows Cooper's distrust--even fear--of a republic: "'Our country, right or wrong,' is a high-sounding maxim, but it is scarcely the honest man's maxim. . . . I hate your pithy sayings; they commonly mean nothing that is substantially good at bottom" (p. 77). Yet he admires the eloquently reasoned Declaration of Independence. In Mr. Wharton, Cooper portrays vacillation as a failure of sensibility; in Captain Willoughby the reasoned, thoughtful refusal to declare allegiance to a specific cause actually becomes a sign of sensibility.

Another indication of the severity of the shift in Cooper's approach to patriotism is his introduction of the character Joel Strides. It is this man, the Yankee overseer at the Hutted Knoll, who mouths the most patriotic sentiments, but he is a sad contrast to Cooper's first Yankee, the Christ-like, self-effacing Harvey Birch of The Spy. Strides is foreshadowed, of course, in Steadfast Dodge of the Home novels, but his most immediate prototype is Ithuel Bolt of Wing and Wing, the novel Cooper wrote just prior to Wyandotté.

Bolt is serving aboard Raoul Yvard's lugger, the Feu Follet, having escaped from the Prosperpine after being impressed by the British. Bolt has all the unattractive attributes of Cooper's later Yankees: he is all bones and angles in body and all cunning and shrewdness in mind. Cooper makes him a native of New Hampshire, the "granite State," in order to underscore his lack of sensibility: "notwithstanding he was not absolutely made of the stone in question, there was an absence of the ordinary symptoms of natural feeling about him, that had induced many of his French acquaintances in part to affirm that there was a good deal more of marble in his moral temperament at least, than usually fell to the lot of human beings" (p. 47).

At the close of the novel Raoul, the hero, dies in a battle with the British fleet and Ghita, the heroine, withdraws to a convent. Ithuel Bolt disappears to turn up in America later as "a patron of the temperance cause, a teetotaler, and a general terror to evil-doers, under the appellation of Deacon Bolt" (p. 469). The weak, the dedicated, and the heroic often die in Cooper's novels; but shrewd, hardy, morally shady Yankees survive forever.

Joel Strides shares many of Ithuel Bolt's qualities, though he is a more fully realized character than the Yankee sailor. Like Steadfast Dodge, this demagogue constantly furthers his own selfish desires with cries of "the people" and declarations of "liberty and equality."

The real source of his discontent and his pseudo-patriotism is jealousy of his employer's social position and his material wealth. He cannot bear to see a "social chasm" as wide as that between his family and the family of Captain Willoughby growing no narrower:

Utterly incapable of appreciating the width of that void which separates the gentleman from the man of coarse feelings and illiterate vulgarity, he began to preach that doctrine of exaggerated and mistaken equality which says, "One man is as good as another."
(p. 327)

Such men, Cooper remarks earlier in the novel, "abound under all systems where human liberty is highly privileged, being the moral fungi of freedom as the rankest weeds are known to be the troublesome and baneful production of the richest soil" (p. 100). In the chronology of Cooper's fiction, these "moral fungi" did not surface until 1838; yet in Wyandotté, he portrays them, "aided by the opinions and temper of the times," as evil by-products of the American Revolution. The Skinners and the Cowboys of The Spy are outlaws, scattered marauders, whose confiscation of movable property is openly recognized as criminal and evil. Joel Strides and his ilk, operating under the assumed mask of piety and patriotic feeling, constitute a much greater threat to America.

What Joel Strides really wants is the Huttet Knoll. He is shrewd enough to see that with Captain Willoughby uncommitted and Robert Willoughby an officer in the British army, the property may soon end up in legal and political

limbo--and Joel intends to be around to pick up the title. Cooper declares sarcastically, "It is surprising how many, and sometimes how pure patriots are produced by just such hopes, as those of Joel" (p. 149).

What Wyandotté represents, then, is not so much an alteration in Cooper's view of the American Revolution,³ but rather a change in his attitude toward patriotism. In the 1820's and 1830's, Cooper believed that America merited the most altruistic loyalty: Harvey Birch, Peyton Dunwoodie, and the Red Rover demonstrate as much. By 1843, however, Cooper had become suspicious of the kind of exploitative loyalty practiced by levelers like Joel Strides and Jason Newcome. Even in his sincerely loyal heroes like the Littlepages, "true patriotism" began to consist of "laying bare every thing like public vice, and in calling such things by their right names" (Satanstoe, p. iv).

Wyandotté serves as an almost indispensable introduction to the anti-rent trilogy (Satanstoe, The Chain-bearer, and The Redskins, 1845-46), which traces the Littlepage family through several generations. The major link

³John P. McWilliams, Political Justice in a Republic, sees Wyandotté as representative of a shift in Cooper's view of the Revolution (see pp. 85-99). The new view of the Revolution is only one aspect of Cooper's more cautious approach to patriotism.

is the character of Joel Strides: his Yankee acquisitiveness, his Puritanical narrowness, and his demagogic leveling identify him as the immediate prototype of the Newcomes of the Littlepage novels. Like Joel Strides, the Newcomes are the new patriots, mouthing all the democratic sentiment which seems to promise them sufficient freedom to line their own pockets.

The Littlepages, morally perceptive and socially refined, stand as the rapidly diminishing bulwark against the encroaching levelers. In fact, the trilogy comprises a saga of America, delineating in miniature the death of the American dream. The anti-rent controversy, which reached its peak in 1846, afforded Cooper the opportunity he needed to demonstrate the deterioration in America which resulted when the tyranny of the majority displaced the influence of the morally superior minority.⁴ For Cooper, the anti-rent struggle reflected not simply an economic and political upheaval, but also the decay of moral principle which signaled the end of the American dream. This decay takes the form of a failure of sensibility, much more insidious and therefore much more dangerous than the failure in Billy Kirby or Hiram Doolittle in The Pioneers, the novel which Satanstoe recalls in setting and action.

⁴In a letter written in 1847, Cooper declares: "As to anti-rentism, in my judgment it is to be the test of the institutions," The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper, V, ed. James Franklin Beard (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), 184.

Contrary to the assertion of a number of commentators on Cooper's anti-rent trilogy, Satanstoe is not merely a "simple, idyllic society"⁵ or a "holiday from Cooper's more strenuous ideas."⁶ In fact, The Pioneers is much more idyllic than Satanstoe: not only do Billy Kirby and Richard Jones practice their wastefulness openly rather than surreptitiously, but they are chastised roundly by Marmaduke Temple, whose reprimands command as much attention as his judgments. Moreover, the marriage of Oliver Effingham and Elizabeth unites not only two estates, but also two families whose moral sensibility will control both the personal and community judgments of their descendants. The reader is left with the impression that the Billy Kirbys and the Richard Joneses will be controlled as effectively by Oliver Effingham as they are by Marmaduke Temple. And, even though Natty Bumppo has been forced to flee the confines of civilization, he has left a moral legacy with those representatives of civilization sensitive enough to absorb his message.

In Satanstoe, the ingredients for an Edenic existence are admittedly present. The Littlepages, if they are not the highest social class in America in 1758, are obviously of the upper class: educated, refined, sensitive,

⁵McWilliams, Political Justice in a Republic, p. 311.

⁶James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 201.

reasonably wealthy. They have the kind of family sentiment and family stability which makes for strong traditions and community leadership. On the surface, the marriage of Cornelius Littlepage and Anneke Mordaunt, like that of Oliver Effingham and Elizabeth Temple, promises a continuation of all the positive attributes of civilization.

The seemingly unruffled surface in Satanstoe belies the true state of affairs in the novel. At the end of the novel, Cooper leaves no doubt that the security which should result from the marriage of Corny and Anneke is shaky indeed. The French may have retreated and the Hurons may have been repelled, but the seeds of discord have been firmly planted in the person of Jason Newcome. At the beginning of the novel, the Connecticut Yankee is a mere interloper come to "keep school" following the Reverend Mr. Worden's decision to devote his full energies to his Episcopal ministry. By the end of the story, he has entrenched himself firmly into the political, social, and economic life of Ravensnest, the patent of Herman Mordaunt. Anneke Mordaunt's father is a clear-eyed realist, but even he fails to perceive the danger represented by Jason Newcome. Considering Jason's schooling an asset, he willingly grants him a lease for a choice mill-seat. Cooper, however, has made clear the nature of the Connecticut Yankee in Joel Strides of Wyandotté; he has even suggested his potential danger in Strides's underhanded

attempts to steal his employer's estate. Strides fails, primarily because circumstances do not work his way rather than because of any perspicacity on the part of his employer. He reappears in the person of the Newcomes of the anti-rent trilogy.

Thus in Satanstoe Cooper is not lured from his "more strenuous ideas" into writing a pleasant little novel of manners. He deliberately creates a social structure designed to point up the failure of sensibility in those encroaching levelers who multiply as the anti-rent trilogy proceeds. Since manners for Cooper always reflect morals, he juxtaposes in this social organization various types of Americans whose behavior and attitudes molded the course of the country's social and moral history.

He chooses both his classes and his representatives carefully. The family of Herman Mordaunt occupies the highest rung on the social ladder, but from the standpoint of moral sensibility, the apex and the nadir of the social structure are presented respectively in Corny Littlepage and Jason Newcome. In order to stress the positive and negative qualities of these polar examples, Cooper portrays a whole range of intermediate types, including the Westchester Dutch, the Albany Dutch, the English soldiery transplanted to American soil, the Negro slave and an Onandaga Indian--though the contrast between these last two does not mature until The Redskins, the third volume of the trilogy.

Although by 1845 Cooper had ceased making the English officer a villain, he uses Captain Bulstrode as a character foil for Corny Littlepage. Bulstrode is an efficient and competent officer; at the same time, he is suave, debonair, and cosmopolitan. Corny, on the other hand, is sometimes naive, occasionally provincial, and often winningly innocent. The major contrast between the two lies in their exercise of sensibility. Bulstrode is directed almost completely by his head, while Corny operates strictly by his heart. Bulstrode sincerely wishes to marry Anneke, but even in romance he calculates, he weighs, he balances. He coolly evaluates Anneke's assets, notes her deficiencies, and concludes that she is improvable: "The aid of a little fashion and training" will make her one of the first women of England (p. 105). He carries on his courtship of Anneke like a military strategist: he seeks to cover his weaknesses and play up his strengths; under the latter, he includes the drama of marching off to battle and the "happy" circumstance of being wounded near enough to Ravensnest so that he can be brought into Anneke's presence to recuperate. He is quite willing for Corny to act as his rival so long as Corny agrees to play the "game" by the "rules."

At almost every encounter between the two, Corny's spontaneity is set in bold relief by Bulstrode's deliberation. It is Corny's genuine love for Anneke, not any kind

of strategy which directs all of his actions toward her. He retrieves her from the paws of a lion and from the deadly icebergs of the Hudson River out of physical courage rather than shrewdness. He is appalled both by Bulstrode's plan to "improve" Anneke and his dishonest refusal to apprise her of his father's hesitation to accept an American daughter-in-law and his father's true financial condition. In addition, Corny exhibits a social and a moral delicacy foreign to Bulstrode. He winces at the English officer's impropriety in making questionable toasts to unknown ladies and his part in presenting a tasteless farce, The Beaux' Strategem, for the entertainment of the ladies. He refuses to join Bulstrode in espousing Juvenal's maxim: "Honesty is praised and starves" (p. 92). Corny's attitudes and actions are open, perhaps, to the charge of prudishness; certainly he lacks the largess characteristic of some of Cooper's earlier heroes. Establishing the moral inviolability of Corny's manners and character is a serious business to his creator, however; Cooper is determined to demonstrate unequivocally that a threat to the Littlepages is a threat to the moral foundations of society.

Yet the real threat is not Bulstrode: he serves merely as a foil to delineate Corny's character. At the end of his military service in America, he returns to England to live out his life as a bachelor. The real danger is Jason Newcome and his descendants--and Cooper's

primary purpose in Satanstoe is to portray without reservation the true nature of the enemy. He does this first of all by setting up two young Dutchmen as foils to Jason. Like the Connecticut schoolteacher, Dirck Follock and Guert Ten Eyck do not measure up to Corny in education and refinement. They--especially Guert--are fun-loving, mischievous, seldom serious; they lack both the moral maturity and the social propriety which education develops. The deficiency is one that Cooper does not try to minimize; his heroine declares of Guert: ". . . nature intended Guert Ten Eyck for better things than accident and education, or the want of education, have enabled him to become. Had Guert Ten Eyck been educated at Oxford he would have been a very different man from what he is. If a man has only the instruction of a boy, he will long remain a boy" (p. 216). Despite the lively appeal with which Cooper invests Guert's character, this reservation persists. As he does in the case of Isabella Singleton in The Spy, Cooper neatly disposes of a character whose candor and basic goodness are overshadowed by an undisciplined nature: Guert Ten Eyck receives the last fatal bullet fired by the Hurons in the attack on Ravensnest.

Guert lives long enough, however, to serve as the direct antithesis of Jason Newcome. Where Guert is open, fun-loving, and generous, Jason is narrow, Puritanically hypocritical, and niggardly. Guert openly enjoys

sleigh-rides most men his age have outgrown; Jason surreptitiously plays "all-fours" in the woods, guiltily secret- ing the cards when Corny and Guert approach. Guert steals a neighbor's dinner all in fun; Jason plots the theft of Ravensnest from the man who has just generously leased to him a choice mill-seat. Corny points out the distinction between the two: "All the wildness of Guert's impulses could not altogether destroy his feelings, tone, and tact as a gentleman; while all the soaring, extravagant pre- tensions of Jason never could have ended in elevating him to that character" (p. 478).

It is Jason's "pretensions" which constitute the major threat in Satanstoe. Throughout his early fiction, Cooper repeatedly emphasizes that sincere family feeling is a primary manifestation of sensibility. Family unity, family loyalty, and family stability are recurring themes in the novels of the 1820's and 1830's. Jason Newcome is portrayed repeatedly by Cooper as "anti-family." He demonstrates none of the feeling, the sentiment, the pride of family that characterize Corny's attitude toward the Littlepages. Jason evaluates everything and everybody in terms of profit:

"I wonder your folks don't think of giving you suthin' to do, Corny," commenced Jason, one day after our acquaintance had ripened into a sort of belliger- ent intimacy. "You're near nineteen, now, and ought to begin to think of bringing suthin' in, to pay for all the outgoin's." (p. 42)

Jason wonders that the "old folks" (Corny's parents), have never "footed up the total" of Corny's college expenses.⁷ He listens incredulously when Corny admits that he himself has never kept account of his educational expenses. To Jason, all relationships, even those between family members, are subject to calculation and economic evaluation.

In Cooper's earlier novels, the threat to family stability comes primarily from easily recognizable forces: war or Indian attacks, for example. With the advent of the Newcomes, this threat takes on a more subtle, but a more deadly appearance. To Jason, sentimental attachment to family and property means nothing. Tradition, if it exists for him at all, is thoroughly overshadowed by greed. Corny says of him:

For property he had a profound deference, so far as that deference extended to its importance and influence; but it would have cost him not the slightest qualm, either in the way of conscience or feeling, to find himself suddenly installed in the mansion of the patroons, for instance, and placed in possession of their estates, provided only he fancied he could maintain his position. The circumstance that he was dwelling under the roof that was erected by another man's ancestors, for instance, and that others were living who had a better moral right to it, would give him no sort of trouble, so long as any quirk of the law would sustain him in possession. In a word, all that was allied to sentiment, in matters of this nature, was totally lost on Jason Newcome. (p. 316)

⁷In The Sea Lions, the parsimonious Yankee, Deacon Pratt, keeps a careful account of all the money he spends for the education of his niece Mary.

The accuracy of Corny's estimate of Jason's lack of sensibility is graphically borne out later when Ravensnest is under attack from the Hurons. Jason decides that since the Hurons have "conquered" the settlement, it no longer belongs to Herman Mordaunt. Consequently, says Jason, "if we ever get repossession, it will be by another conquest. Now, what I want to know is this--does not conquest give the conquerors a right to the conquered territory?" (p. 441).

The Newcome threat to the Littlepage family and its property (when Corny marries Anneke, Ravensnest becomes his) is a threat peculiar to the America of the 1840's. Despite the fact that Satanstoe is set in 1758 at a time when the colonies display little hostility toward the Mother country, Jason exhibits all the leveling tendencies of the Jacksonian democrats who greeted Cooper upon his return from Europe in 1833. Corny describes Jason as "ultra leveling in his notions of social intercourse," while he himself adheres strongly to the "distinctions of class" (p. 42). The difference is that Jason defers obsequiously to money and titles, whereas Corny defers to the superiority in manners and morals.

Cooper's characterization of this new enemy in America shows a much more strident, much less tolerant view of the "villain" than the author takes in his earlier fiction. The failure of sensibility displayed by Jason

Newcome elicits from Corny Littlepage, who serves both as Cooper's narrator and the beau ideal of the landed gentry, a brand of sharp personal criticism foreign to Marmaduke Temple and Cooper's genteel heroes.

In describing Jason's personal appearance and habits, Corny is more acrimonious than any of his fictional predecessors. In fact, there is often something close to spitefulness in Corny's tone when he talks of Jason. Of the Yankee's physical appearance he says: "In figure he was tall, but he was angular, loose jointed and swinging--slouching would be a better word." Corny reveals with relish that Jason earns from his students the nickname of "Jason Old Comb"--no doubt the result of the "lank, orderly arrangement of his jet-black, and somewhat greasy-looking locks" (p. 37). In Corny's descriptions of Jason, he often employs animal imagery, either directly or indirectly: he says that Jason is "as active as a cat"; he often describes the Yankee as "covert," "crouching," and "sneaking" in his behavior; he gleefully records Colonel Follock's designation of the Yankees as "the locusts of the west."

When Corny describes Jason's speech, his tone is no less condescending. Corny presents Jason satirically as an avid reformer of the language who has his own peculiar stock of "decidedly vulgar and vicious sounds":

His first step was to improve the language, by adapting sound in spelling, and he insisted on calling angel, an-gel, because a-n spelt an; chamber, cham-ber, for the same reason; and so on through a long catalogue of similarly constructed words. "English," he did not pronounce as "Ing-lish," but as "English," for instance; and "nothing" (Anglice nuthing), as noth-ing; or, perhaps, it were better to say "naw-thin'." While Jason showed himself so much a purist with these and many other words, he was guilty of some of the grossest possible mistakes, that were directly in opposition to his own theory. Thus, while he affectedly pronounced "none," (nun), as "known," he did not scruple to call "stone," "stun," and "home," "hum." (p. 408)

Corny even goes so far as to cite Jason's phonetic errors as evidence of his failure in moral sensibility: "From the foregoing specimens, half a dozen among a thousand, the reader will get an accurate notion of this weakness in Jason's character" (emphasis added). The prohibition on dialect does not extend to the Dutch--who, if they sometimes lack propriety, always display goodness of heart. Corny is delighted when Dirck Follock lapses into a heavy Dutch pronunciation, "though in general he spoke English quite as well as I did myself, and vastly better than that miracle of taste and learning, and virtue, and piety, Mr. Jason Newcome, A. B. of Yale, and prospective president of that, or some other institution" (p. 52).

This penchant for making fun of Jason is reflected in almost everything Corny says of the Yankee. The criticism is obviously justified, but the manner of making it is sharply different from the approach of Cooper's earlier heroes. Corny admires the fact that Rev. Mr. Worden

always enters a church in a "decorous and spiritual manner."

He deplores Jason's entrances:

Usually, he wore his cocked-hat on the back of his head, thereby lending himself a lolloping, negligent, and at the same time, defying air; but I observed that, as we all uncovered, he brought his own beaver up over his eyebrows, in a species of military bravado. To uncover to a church, in his view of the matter, was a sort of idolatry; there might be images about, for any thing he knew; and a man could never be enough on his guard against being carried away by such evil deceptions. (p. 170)

Even when Corny refrains from overt sarcasm about Jason, his condescending attitude still manages to emerge. When Corny, Dirck, and Jason are all in Albany for the first time, their wondering fascination with the city is a natural reaction. Corny describes his own response and that of Dirck as natural, innocent curiosity; of Jason he is not quite so tolerant: "Not the least striking picture of the scene, was Jason, in the middle of the street, gaping about him, in the cocked-hat, the pea-green coat, and the striped woollen stockings" (p. 168). At their first evening meal, Dirck is "attracted" by Dutch dishes, Corny finds the venison "much to his taste"--but Jason very inelegantly "alighted on a hash, of some sort or other, that he did not quit until he had effectually disposed of it" (p. 173). Corny's somewhat flattering portraits of himself are explained as essential to the clarity and completeness of the story. Whatever Jason does, however--whether it be eating, speaking, walking, playing cards,

or fighting Indians--filters through Corny's narrative as low and meanly crude.

Cooper's early heroes exhibit none of this condescension. Marmaduke Temple upbraids, correct, advises and lectures Billy Kirby for his wastefulness and Remarkable Pettibone for her disrespect to her new mistress, Elizabeth Temple, but he never ridicules either. Cooper's early romantic heroes are as courteous to Katy Haynes, Betty Flanagan, and Esther Bush as they are to the elegant ladies of their own class. They are never guilty of even the harmless "baiting" that Corny directs toward Mrs. Light, the gossipy landlady, in an effort to gain information. Somehow, they seem above this pettiness, too concerned with larger issues to engage in idle byplay or personality assaults. Corny "inherits" his tendency toward ridicule and peevish criticism from John Effingham of the Home novels, but Corny is the first of Cooper's romantic heroes to cultivate such an attitude. In Homeward Bound and Home As Found, Paul Powis/Effingham participates very little in the baiting and "setting up" of Steadfast Dodge. He takes issue with Dodge on occasion and points out to the editor the inconsistencies in his philosophy of leveling, but he does so in the spirit of correction rather than condescension. The sensibility which manifests itself as graciousness and manly reserve in Cooper's early heroes is all too frequently missing in the Littlepage narrators.

Mordaunt Littlepage (The Chainbearer, 1846), son of Corny and Anneke, is even further removed from these early heroes than Corny is. He is less carefree and more wary than the young Corny just to the extent that the Littlepage property is more directly threatened in The Chainbearer than it is in Satanstoe.

With an increasing vehemence, the Littlepage narrators continue to associate sensibility in its various manifestations with family traditions and property ownership. The highest sensibility, both social and moral is attributed to those upperclass families like the Littlepages, who recognize the importance of family sentiment to the stability of a community. For the Littlepages, property ownership is somehow bound up with their feelings of patriotism: they believe that the freedom to own property in large amounts is not only a necessary concomitant to civilization, but also that this freedom is one of the primary blessings of a democracy. As major property owners, they protest their willingness to accept the responsibilities attendant upon the patroon. They pride themselves on the generosity of their leases and their willingness to defer to future generations any return from their investments in Mooseridge and Ravensnest.

Conversely, the primary failure of moral sensibility is exemplified in those Yankee squatters and Yankee "squires" who have no family roots and thus no respect for

family tradition and sentiment. Significantly, both the Thousandacres and Newcome families of The Chainbearer have only a negative relationship to the soil. They do not cultivate the land; they rape it--Aaron as a squatter who filches timber and Jason as a saw-miller for whom such stolen timber becomes the effective grist for his mill. They are "takers," whose greed is so boundless that surveying chains and mill-seat leases enrage them. Both of these Yankees exploit the sentiment of patriotism by loudly declaiming their own rights to property and privileges that, in Cooper's view, not only must be rightfully earned, but also must be reserved for those whose backgrounds, education, and manners have fitted them for such responsibilities.

Mordaunt Littlepage, having been occupied some half dozen years with fighting in the Revolutionary War and attending college, returns to Ravensnest to encounter both of these enemies within a short time. He surprises Jason Newcome in the implementation of a peculiarly Yankee brand of democracy: cutting a majority "out of a fourth of those present" at a meeting, for the purpose of insuring that the one "meetin'us" to be erected will bear the Congregationalist seal rather than that of any of the other denominations represented in Ravensnest. Jason does his work so insidiously that his neighbors, whose simplicity is hardly a match for Yankee cunning, are tricked into

voting for the very thing they do not want, the Congregationalist meeting house. Only Mordaunt Littlepage has the sagacity to penetrate Newcome's ruse and lament to himself with some fervor: "God forbid, I repeat, that a mere personal majority should assume the power which alone belongs to principles" (p. 127).

Cooper's principal foil to Jason--and later in the novel to Aaron Thousandacres--is Andries Coejamans, the Chainbearer engaged in the surveying of the Littlepage holdings. In Satanstoe, Corny insists that Jason surpasses him intellectually only in mathematics. Aaron has none of Jason's ability to calculate, to plan, to scheme. In fact, what has kept Andries a mere carrier of chain is his inability to "calkerlate," as a gossipy landlady tells Mordaunt. This weakness in the Chainbearer is emphasized so repeatedly and in such contexts that it becomes a virtue. All that he lacks in calculation, Andries makes up for in feeling and intuition: he is, Mordaunt insists, "illiterate almost to greatness" (p. 10).

Andries Coejamans serves not only as a foil to Jason Newcome, but even more directly as a contrast to the Yankee squatter, Aaron Thousandacres. Their names symbolize their moral natures: the chains constantly draped over the shoulders of the Chainbearer point up his belief in right and necessary restraints; the acres that Thousandacres has desecrated and despoiled exemplify his lawlessness and

his refusal to operate under any limits which prohibit the exercise of his greed.

The debate between the two men comprises the structural and thematic center of the novel (Chapters 20-22). Aaron Thousandacres calls into the service of his argument all the old standbys--natural law, the Bible, liberty--to justify his thievery of the Littlepage timber. In his view, the glory of America is that the land is there and he who is in possession holds prior claim: "It's enough that a man wants the land, and he comes or sends to secure it. Possession is everything, and I call it possession to crave a spot, and to make some sort of calkerlation [the word is no accident], or works, reasonably near it. . . . That's what I call liberty! Let every man have as much land as he's need on, that's my religion, and it's liberty too" (pp. 327-28, 373). In Cooper's view, this is patriotism perverted into a frightful monster.

Andries argues that the Littlepages and Follocks wanted the land first, but they fulfilled the requirements of legal and moral ownership by paying the Indians (a point Cooper makes repeatedly) and the king and by having the land properly surveyed at least three times. He tells Thousandacres contemptuously: "Oh! you're a true son of liperty! a true son of liperty, accordin' to your own conceit! You want eferyt'ing in your own way, and eferyt'ing in your own pocket. T'ie Lort's law is a law for

T'ousantacres, put not a law to care for Cornelius Littlepage or Tirck Follock!" (p. 329). As he does in Satanstoe, Cooper contrives to make the Dutchman's almost incomprehensible English more attractive than the Yankee's bad grammar.

Andries demonstrates still another kind of sensibility. Cooper invariably invests the positive lower class characters of his later fiction with a sensitive deference to their social superiors. When Andries and Mordaunt are serving together in the Revolutionary War, the Chainbearer briefly entertains the notion that Mordaunt should marry Andries' niece, Dus Malbone. Once he is back to carrying chain and Dus is sometimes even employed to help him, he sees that their poverty and their lack of social position render Dus unsuitable for such a match. He is disturbed when he learns that Mordaunt has proposed to Dus; on his deathbed, he extracts from Dus the promise that she will not marry Mordaunt if his family exhibits the smallest objection to the match.

Donald Ringe sees an increasingly democratic attitude in the Littlepages' choices of marriage partners. Corny marries above his station when he weds Anneke Mordaunt, while Mordaunt seemingly marries below his in choosing Dus Malbone.⁸ The truth is that Cooper shares the

⁸"The Littlepage Novels: Change and Stability in American Society," AL, 32 (November 1960), 284.

Chainbearer's views about the proper marriage choices. He is very careful to make Dus Malbone intellectually and socially fitting for Mordaunt Littlepage. Morally superior as Andries is, Cooper "waters down" the kinship by making Dus the daughter of Andries' half-sister. Pris Bayard, an upper class friend of the Littlepages in love with Dus's brother Frank, assures Mordaunt with a haste that embarrasses even her, that the two "Malbones have none of the blood of the Coejamans" (p. 72). Cooper cannot quite bring himself to marry one of his genteel heroes to the true niece of an illiterate chain carrier, regardless of how much the Chainbearer's moral sensibility recalls the character of the Leatherstocking.

In addition, Cooper is careful to construct for Dus the same kind of superior background in education and manners that he creates for Mabel Dunham of The Pathfinder. Coming under the care of Mrs. Stratton, a friend of her mother's who kept a school, Dus received a better education than she could have obtained under Andries' care (p. 20). At this school, Dus formed acquaintances with young ladies of taste, refinement, wealth and superior background.

Cooper chooses a particularly appropriate symbol to suggest that, despite Dus's present reduced circumstances, her background makes her a fitting companion for a Littlepage. In the meager setting at Ravensnest, Dus

serves tea to Mordaunt, the owner of the patent, in a silver tea service that suggests what she has been. Mordaunt muses over the significance of the silver: "That set of silver was all that remained to Ursula Malbone of a physical character, and which marked the former condition of her family; and doubtless she cherished it with no feeling of morbid pride, but as a melancholy monument of a condition to which all her opinions, tastes, and early habits constantly reminded her she properly belonged" (p. 160).

Still another indication of Dus's sensibility which renders her worthy of a Littlepage is her recitation of the Episcopal prayers for the dead at the bedsides of her uncle and the squatter. This symbolic act cannot help but single her out in a frontier community where there is no church--only a Congregationalist "meetin'us" filled with gaping levelers who condescend neither to remove their hats nor to kneel when they come to worship. Indeed, Prudence and Lowinny Timberman, wife and daughter of Thousandacres stand unbending as the kneeling Dus recites prayers over their dying husband and father. The scene is not mere melodrama on Cooper's part; throughout his fiction the practice of the Episcopal religion serves as a reflection of both social and moral sensibility.

Further evidence of Dus's superiority is reflected in her uncle's violent reaction to Aaron Thousandacres' request that she marry his son, Zephaniah. Andries has

reservations about whether Dus is good enough for Mordaunt Littlepage, but he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that she is too good for Zephaniah. He declares vehemently to Aaron: "She shalt nefer marry a squatter--she shalt nefer marry any man t'at ist not of a class, ant feelin's, ant habits, and opinions, fit to pe ti' huspant of a laty!" (p. 383). All of Andries' derisive taunts about the squatter's greed and his spurious philosophy of "liperty" have angered Aaron, but it is this final insult which ends in the Chainbearer's death from a bullet which Cooper strongly suggests comes from Aaron's rifle.

From a philosophical point, it is Andries Coejamans who occupies the limelight in The Chainbearer. Indeed Mordaunt Littlepage is almost overshadowed in much of the novel by Andries. When Mordaunt emerges into the foreground, he does so as a character with neither the attractive naiveté of Corny Littlepage nor the magnanimity and nobility of Cooper's earlier romantic heroes. Like the Effinghams, he talks about sensibility more than he practices it, and he displays none of the moral imagination so characteristic of Oliver Effingham of The Pioneers or Peyton Dunwoodie of The Spy. His major act of generosity, allowing the greedy, selfish Jason Newcome to renew a lease that Mordaunt has every right to terminate, is attended by a certain amount of baiting, sneering, and ridiculing that is decidedly beneath Cooper's earlier

heroes. When he finally grants the lease, he dangles it before Jason while he insists that the lease renewal is the product of Littlepage liberality rather than Newcome rights.

Such ungentle sneering is typical of Mordaunt at several other points in The Chainbearer. Without immediate provocation, Mordaunt lashes out at Jason about the general tendency of Yankees to meddle: "Meddling, I have been given to understand, is the great vice of our immigrant population, in particular, who never think they have their just rights, unless they are privileged to talk about, and sit in judgment on the affairs of all within twenty miles of them, making two-thirds of their facts as they do so, in order to reconcile their theories with the wished-for results" (p. 408). At another time, Mordaunt, like his father before him, pumps a gossiping landlady for information, then turns away in disgust--"disrelish for vulgarity . . . getting the better of curiosity" (p. 99).

If we add this kind of exclusiveness and snobbishness to the fact that Mordaunt Littlepage actually does very little of a positive nature in The Chainbearer, the result is a picture of a hero very unlike Cooper's earlier portraits. Mordaunt spends much of his time as the prisoner of Thousandacres or as the auditor of the debates between the squatter and the Chainbearer. The rest of the time he is involved in the very personal business of

finding a wife or trying to convince his family that he has found the right one. He is redeemed by none of the courageous exploits--like saving his beloved from lions and tumultuous rivers--that make Corny appealing. Then, too, there is something a little ungentlemanly in a hero's concealing his identity (as Mordaunt does from Aaron) and his presence (as Mordaunt does from Jason) for the purpose of allowing the enemy to incriminate himself. Such a motive for disguise hardly ranks with the selfless patriotism which prompts the disguises of Harvey Birch or the Red Rover.

And yet, Mordaunt Littlepage seems relatively noble in comparison with his grandson, Hugh Roger Littlepage, who narrates The Redskins, third novel in the Littlepage trilogy. Cooper skips a generation to make the action in The Redskins contemporaneous with the actual anti-rent struggle of 1846. The situation has worsened until not only the Newcomes, but the majority of the tenants on Ravensnest are ready and willing to overthrow the "aristocratical" landlords and seize the lands that their fathers and grandfathers have leased. These tenants operate under the Thousandacres philosophy: possession supersedes paper title. They refuse to recognize or to accept any appeal to family sentiment and tradition.

Again Cooper makes a point of associating leveling tendencies with a failure of both social and moral sensibility. The Newcomes have expanded into a whole community

of leveling anti-renters who refuse to kneel in church, who do not choose to remove their hats either in church or in parlors, who consistently use bad grammar and chew tobacco. In addition the new woman, Opportunity Newcome, crude of speech and manner, makes suggestive remarks, accepts gifts from strange men, and, worst of all, openly courts Hugh Littlepage.

These leveling anti-renters have carried the distortion of patriotism so far that they shout their demagogic cries from the pulpit of the local "meetin-us"--not to be confused, of course, with the Episcopal church, presided over by a genteel and decidedly pro-landlord Mr. Warren. The anti-rent lecturer declares from the pulpit that he goes by the "glorious appellation" of a "democrat" and proceeds to lambast everything he considers "undemocratic":

"Where is this Hugh Littlepage at this very moment? In Paris, squandering your hard earnings in riotous living, according to the best standards of aristocracy. He lives in the midst of abundance, dresses richly and fares richly, while you and yours are eating the sweat of your brows. He is no man for a pewter spoon and two-pronged fork! No, my countrymen! He must have a gold spoon for some of his dishes. . . . Hugh Littlepage would not put his knife into his mouth, as you and I do, in eating--as all plain, unpretending citizens do--for the world. It would choke him; no, he keeps silver forks to touch his anointed lips." (p. 252)

Just as the humble Andries Coejamans in The Chain-bearer speaks for the deference and humility which Cooper felt that the lower classes owed the higher, so the lowly

mechanic, Tim Hall, stands for such deference in The Redskins. Following the anti-rent lecturer, Hall speaks with "great moderation, both of manner and tone." Most of his comments come straight from the pages of The American Democrat; and although Hugh vows that his "utterance, accent, and language" are "tinctured by his habits and associations," the reader has a hard time distinguishing Hall's "utterance, accent and language" from those of Hugh Littlepage. By the 1840's, Cooper had great difficulty in separating refinement of speech and moral sensibility. The mechanic says--very reasonably and not a little elegantly:

"Hugh Littlepage has just as good a right to his ways as I have to mine. . . . This setting of ourselves up as the standard in all things is anything but liberty. If I don't like to eat my dinner with a man who uses a silver fork, no man in this country can compel me. On the other hand, if young Mr. Littlepage doesn't like a companion who chews tobacco as I do, he ought to be left to follow his inclinations." (p. 260)

Besides serving as a quiet contrast to the anti-rent lecturer's leveling bombast, Hall's comments serve as a suitable adjunct to the views of Hugh about the importance of property ownership. In pointing out that Hugh as the owner of Ravensnest pays one-twentieth of the taxes of the whole county (p. 259), Hall suggests one of Cooper's favorite theories about property ownership: the man who has so much financial investment in a community will exhibit the most concern and the most generosity in the welfare of that community.

Cooper is careful throughout the Littlepage trilogy to emphasize this aspect of family sentiment. He does it most appealingly in Satanstoe by showing us the warmth, the love, and the genuine concern the members of the Littlepage and Mordaunt families have for one another. Both Evans Littlepage and Herman Mordaunt, in purchasing and securing Mooseridge and Ravensnest, demonstrate their desire to insure family solidarity for the future generations of their lines. In The Chainbearer, where Cooper unfortunately does more telling than showing, he has Corny, now General Littlepage, advise Mordaunt to construct his permanent residence at Ravensnest: "Nothing contributes so much to the civilization of a country as to dot it with a gentry, and you will both give and receive advantages by adopting such a course. It is impossible for those who have never been witnesses of the result to appreciate the effect produced by one gentleman's family in a neighborhood, in the way of manners, tastes, general intelligence, and civilization at large" (p. 453).

Cooper's characters become even more direct and outspoken about the association between property and morality in The Redskins. In delineating to Hugh the wrongs done to the Rensselaer family by the anti-renters' demands, Uncle Ro says:

"This property is not only invested to his entire satisfaction, as regards convenience, security, and returns but also in a way that is connected with some

of the best sentiments of his nature. It is property that has descended to him through ancestors for two centuries; property that is historically connected with his name--on which he was born, on which he has lived, and on which he has hoped to die; property, in a word, that is associated with all the higher feelings of humanity." (p. 34)

Later in the novel, Hugh justifies his feeling of pride in being the owner of Ravensnest by citing such ownership as "the foundation of a sentiment so profound" that it "elevates the feelings of him who experiences it" (p. 121).

As Donald Darnell has pointed out, Cooper makes clear that such a commitment to the land is a moral, not a materialistic attachment.⁹ Consequently, when the anti-renters contrive to steal the Littlepage property, they are counting as nothing the sentiment which bolsters the very foundations of a democratic society. A symbol of the destructive force represented by the anti-renters is the burning of Hugh Littlepage's barn--a symbolic act that Faulkner repeats in the Snopeses a century later. Cooper goes a step further: he has Seneca Newcome, Jason's grandson, nearly succeed in firing Hugh's house--an act that threatens not only Littlepage property, but also the very lives of the Littlepage family.

Thus it may be understandable that the Littlepages would be less objective in their criticism of such personal attackers than Marmaduke Temple is in his chastisement

⁹"Cooper and Faulkner: Land, Legacy, and the Tragic Vision," South Atlantic Bulletin, 34 (1969), 4.

of the Templeton residents who abuse the wilderness. The fact is, however, that Hugh Littlepage and his Uncle Ro become embarrassingly strident, belittling, even peevish in their attacks on the anti-renters and their declamations of their own superiority over their neighbors. They grow so belligerent that it is difficult to accept them, as Cooper obviously means for us to do, as beau ideals of that landed gentry most needed for the "highest order of civilization" (p. 433).

In the first place, the Littlepage heroes become increasingly uninvolved with the family estate. Corny not only personally helps in the surveying of Mooseridge, but he also risks his life to protect Ravensnest against attack by the Hurons. Mordaunt Littlepage visits his estate after an absence of a few years, but he does so primarily in the role of a prisoner or an auditor of the squatter attack on Mooseridge rather than as a protector or a shining example of the landed gentry. Hugh Littlepage is even further withdrawn from his property: as The Redskins opens, he and his Uncle Ro have been in Europe for five years and have had little contact with their native land. In an attempt to inform the reader about the evils of anti-rentism, Cooper constructs a poor imitation of a Socratic dialogue with Uncle Ro (who somehow seems to know all about a situation he has just heard of) as the teacher and Hugh as the ingénu who emerges as more naive than

interested. Paradoxically, as Cooper grows increasingly insistent about the contributions of the landed gentry, his gentry emerge as much less interested in making those contributions and much more interested in securing their privacy and their personal possessions.

Hugh Littlepage demonstrates the least sensibility in his personal character of any of Cooper's genteel heroes; in fact, in Hugh and Ro, carping is practiced as an art and crotchet is elevated to a virtue. They contend that if the anti-renters were right in their desire to steal from the landlords, they would have no need of "secret combinations and disguises." Yet Hugh and Ro return to Ravensnest disguised as a peddler and an organ-grinder so that they can determine secretly what the anti-renters are up to. Hugh contends that the volatile situation at Ravensnest necessitates the disguise. The two do not hesitate to remove their disguises, however, with a great deal of theatrical fanfare at a dangerous moment when they are surrounded by agitated anti-renters disguised as "Injins." Moreover, Hugh's objection to appearing as an organ-grinder smacks more of effeteness than sensitivity: he balks at being expected to share a bed or even a room with his uncle when they seek lodgings; and he complains somewhat peevishly that the worst thing about his disguise is "the coarse habits" he "encounters at table" (p. 76). There is no parallel for such finicalness in Cooper's earlier heroes.

Even when he is not criticizing particular persons, Hugh's tone, unlike that of Cooper's earlier gentry, is more often sarcastic than benevolent. What Cooper obviously intends as a certain gentility in Hugh often emerges as snobbishness instead. The same Hugh who swears by the community benefits resulting from landed property in the hands of the gentry feels only disappointment and mortification when, fresh from the splendor of Europe, he views his own possessions for the first time on his return:

"The things that I had fancied really respectable, and even fine, from recollection, now appeared very commonplace, and in many particulars mean" (p. 166). On the morning after the burning of his barn, he gazes across the estate of Ravensnest with a profound feeling of gratitude to God--not because his estate has survived the attack, but because "[he] was born the heir to such a scene, instead of having [his] lot cast among serfs and dependents" (p. 391).

Then, too, when Hugh and Ro catalogue, in a tone uncomfortably akin to smugness, the extent and the economic value of the Littlepage holdings, the moral commitment to the land is overshadowed by the materialistic interest (pp. 9-11).

One of the greatest distinctions between Hugh and his prototypes in Cooper's earlier fiction is his attitude toward women. In American settings, even Cooper's villains usually behave with civility and protectiveness toward

American women, regardless of their social class. The Littlepages approach the women of their own social level with all the gentlemanliness--even reverence--of Cooper's earlier heroes, but their behavior toward women in lower social classes lacks much of the social and moral sensibility characteristic of the earlier heroes. The "baiting" of gossipy landladies by both Corny and Mordaunt in an attempt to secure information has already been mentioned. In addition, Mordaunt, in The Chainbearer, allows--even encourages--Lowinny Timberman, Thousandacres' daughter, to believe that he has more than a passing interest in her so that she will aid him in escaping from her father.

Hugh's behavior toward Opportunity Newcome is even more questionable. The fact that Opportunity is much more forward and aggressive than any female Cooper had previously drawn hardly justifies either Hugh's sarcasm about her or his deliberate manipulation of her feelings. When he wishes to learn information about the intentions of the anti-renters, Hugh does not hesitate to hint, to cajole, even to court Opportunity, a girl whom he has spent much of his narrative criticizing and ridiculing behind her back. The following exchange between the two presents a genteel hero whose failure of true propriety rivals that of Cooper's earlier English scoundrels:

"You know, Mr. Hugh, I've always been your friend, even from our childish days. . . ."

As Opportunity made this declaration . . . she sighed

gently, dropped her eyes, and looked as conscious and confused as I believe it was at all in her nature to appear. It was not my cue to betray undue bashfulness at such a moment, and as for my scruples on the subject of misleading a confiding heart, I should as soon have thought of feeding an anaconda or a boa-constrictor with angleworms. I took the young lady's hand, therefore, squeezed it with as sentimental pressure as I knew how to use, and looked green enough about the eyes, I daresay

"This has been so kind in you, dear Opportunity," I said, laying my hand gently on the one of hers which held the bridle--"so like old times--so like yourself, indeed--that I scarce know how to thank you. But we shall live to have old-fashioned times again, when the former communications can be opened among us."
(pp. 354-55)

The reader searches in vain among Cooper's early heroes for such blatant perversion and exploitation of the sentiment of love.

The fact is that Hugh Littlepage emerges from the pages of The Redskins as annoyingly strident, embarrassingly finicky, and almost totally lacking in moral imagination. In the novels of the 1820's and early 1830's, sensibility on the level of manners involves serious social relationships; in The Redskins, sensibility on the level of manners is reduced to tiresome compulsions about eating utensils and sleeping quarters. In Cooper's early fiction, sensibility in the larger world is exemplified by the heroes' concern with the moral problems of their society--war, desecration of the landscape, man's relationship to man. In The Redskins, such concerns are overshadowed by the constant defensiveness of the Littlepages and their

overwhelming self-interest. The Cooper hero no longer gives of himself, his talents, or his wealth. Instead, he is busy tallying up his assets and plotting his strategy of economic preservation. At the end of the novel, Hugh Littlepage, the "editor" tells us, is planning to be married to Opportunity Newcome's antithesis, Mary Warren--whom Uncle Ro conveniently endows with a fortune--and to move to Washington for the purpose of "trying the validity of the laws of the United States" concerning his leases (p. 505). If this avenue of redress fails his hero, Cooper says, he "has the refuge of Florence open where he can reside among the other victims of oppression, with the advantage of being admired as a refugee from a republican tyranny" (p. 506). Cooper's own nostalgic preference for Florence explains the choice of refuge, but perhaps only a deepening disappointment in his country can explain the suggestion of complete withdrawal by the landed gentry.

In the Afterword, Cooper excuses his hero's stridency by calling him a "man who has been grievously injured, and who writes with the ardor of youth increased by a sense of wrong" (p. 506). Perhaps because he recognizes that Hugh Littlepage is not an attractive spokesman for the landed gentry, Cooper enlists "outside support" for the Littlepage cause in the person of Susquesus, the Onondaga Indian chief. This Indian is introduced in Satanstoe and spans all three novels of the trilogy. In the first two

novels, Susquesus assumes some of the positive qualities of Cooper's noble Indians, but he does not play an outstanding role in the action except as the probable slayer of Aaron Thousandacres in The Chainbearer. Primarily, in the first two novels, Susquesus is a kind of sounding board for the theories of manifest destiny espoused by the Littlepage heroes.

For example, in The Chainbearer, Mordaunt Littlepage explains to Susquesus both the reason and the necessity of the white man's superiority and his property ownership:

The white man is stronger than the red man and has taken away his country, because he knows most. . . . Now all the knowledge and all the arts of life that the white man enjoys and turns to his profit, come from the rights of property. No man would build a wigwam to make rifles in, if he thought he could not keep it as long as he wished, sell it when he pleased, and leave it to his son when he went to the land of spirits. It is by encouraging man's love of himself in this manner that he is got to do so much. . . . Without these rights of property, no people could be civilized. (p. 112)

In The Chainbearer, Susquesus listens respectfully to Mordaunt's explanation, but in The Redskins, having lived the last half-century of his long life with the Littlepages, Susquesus is inclined to agree with Mordaunt's view. Addressing the band of Indians who have stopped to see him on their return trip from Washington, Susquesus equates the legal deed with moral right. He even suggests that the anti-renters' attempts to steal Littlepage land is a more serious crime than the pale-faces' actual theft

of the red man's land--because the palefaces have a treaty and the Indians did not.

Cooper makes his most telling point with Susquesus when he contrasts the Onondaga chief's devotion to principle with the lawlessness of the anti-rent "Injins." Eaglesflight, one of the chiefs who have come to pay homage of Susquesus, recounts the event of Susquesus' youth which made his name a legend among the Onondagas. Susquesus was in love with Outhwith, a Delaware girl, and she with him, but she had been taken captive by the warrior Waterfowl. Even though Susquesus was a great chief and Waterfowl only a warrior, Susquesus refused to break the law that granted to a warrior his captive. Instead, he withdrew from his tribe and wandered for three-quarters of a century a tribeless man rather than challenge established laws. The uprightness of the Onondaga chief in contrast to the corruptness of the calico "Injins" is obvious. It is now the Indians who exhibit moral sensibility and civilized men who have turned to savagery.

The nineteen real Indians who come to honor an old and revered chief present a sharp and telling anti-thesis to the motley band of calico "Injins" who come to try to wrest his property from an "upright young chief"--Susquesus' phrase. By thus honoring Hugh Littlepage with an Indian title, Cooper associates him with the nobility and high character of the Onondaga. The fact that Susquesus

aligns himself with Hugh's family suggests the fairness of the Littlepage associations with the Indian. Such fairness is always a mark of moral sensibility in Cooper's novels and connects the Littlepages with Natty Bumppo, for whom the Indians--even those who are his enemies--always entertain the profoundest respect.

Although Susquesus' dignity and fair-mindedness make him, after Chingachgook, Cooper's most appealing Indian, even his approval is not sufficient to save Hugh Littlepage from the charge of a failure of sensibility. Hugh fails on the two levels of sensibility which Cooper has spent an entire writing career advocating for his heroes: the level of manners and the level of the moral imagination. By the end of the novel, the reader is uncomfortably aware that the anti-rent lecturer's evaluation of Hugh as an absentee landlord--whose major concerns are gold spoons and silver forks--may not be totally unwarranted. The fine sense of justice and moral responsibility characteristic of Marmaduke Temple and Don Camillo Montforte has given way to carping criticism and narrow self-interest.

Perhaps it was his realization of Hugh's failures which precipitated the final stage in Cooper's treatment of sensibility: in Cooper's last novels, sensitive manners and laudable morals are no longer sufficient to identify the ideal gentleman; his definitive attribute becomes Christian humility.

CHAPTER VIII
 COOPER'S LAST NOVELS: SENSIBILITY
 AS CHRISTIAN HUMILITY

Most critics agree that Cooper's last novels exemplify an increasingly religious emphasis. Frank M. Collins has shown that Cooper's meliorism--his belief that the American landscape and the agrarian gentleman were somehow immune to the corruption of the old world--shaded into quietism in his final years as Cooper became resigned to the belief that neither places nor men can escape the master tempter.¹ Donald Ringe declares that Cooper's last five books demonstrate "an ideal of Christian humility and self-control" by which men should guide their lives and their society.² Edwin Cady identifies a "genetic shift in Cooper's ideal of the essential gentleman" in The Chainbearer and Oak Openings, when Cooper carefully points out that a "Christian" and a "gentleman" are not synonymous.³

Christian behavior and Christian morality are, however, constants in Cooper's fiction from Precaution

¹"Cooper and the American Dream," PMLA, 81 (1966), 79.

²"Cooper's Last Novels, 1847-1850," PMLA, 75 (1960), 590.

³The Gentleman in America (New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1949), p. 118.

(1820) through The Ways of the Hour (1850). In Cooper's first novel, Mrs. Wilson makes clear that the man who married Emily Moseley must be not only a moral gentleman, but a Christian gentleman as well.⁴ In all of Cooper's gentlemen, Christian morality is obvious. The passages cited by Cady do not demonstrate a shift to Christian morality so much as they suggest a significant addition to the gentleman's character: Christian intuition. In making the distinction between the gentleman and the Christian, Cooper says:

The qualities of a gentleman are the best qualities of man unaided by God, while the graces of the Christian come directly from his mercy (The Chainbearer, p. 171)

While the moving principle of a gentleman is respect, that of a Christian is humility. . . . In a word, the first keeps the world, its opinions and its estimate ever uppermost in his thoughts; the last lives only to reverence God, and to conform to His will, in obedience to His revealed mandates. (Oak Openings, p. 212)

Disillusioned and disenchanted by the leveling tendencies and the mercenary character of the America of the 1830's and 1840's, Cooper became less and less convinced that refinement of manners and morals provided the gentleman with a sufficient bulwark against the world. More and more he came to feel that the complete gentleman must develop the highest kind of sensibility: "the

⁴Precaution, p. 84. This and all references to Cooper's novels are to The Works of James Fenimore Cooper, Mohawk edition, 33 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

profoundly beautiful submission of the truly Christian temper" (Oak Openings, p. 226).⁵ Four heroes in Cooper's novels of the 1840's undergo identifiable conversion experiences: Miles Wallingford of the Wallingford novels; Mark Woolston of The Crater; Harry Mulford of Jack Tier; and Roswell Gardiner of The Sea Lions. In each instance, the hero--always alone--intuits in a kind of mystical apprehension his own insignificance in relation to the Cosmos and to God.⁶ It is this metaphysical experience which constitutes the ultimate expression of sensibility in Cooper's novels.

In order to emphasize the importance of this conversion experience, Cooper removes the place of its occurrence far from the American shores. He had come to feel that America no longer provided the ideal setting for the development of Christian humility. His countrymen had become immune to the beneficent influences of the landscape

⁵In Oak Openings (1847), when Cooper tries to invest a once dignified and even ferocious Indian with this "beautiful submission," he lapses into embarrassing sentimentality. Scalping Peter, who spends the first four hundred and fifty pages of the novel fully determined to eradicate the white man, ends up in the last twenty-five pages as a simpering, sentimental mouther of religious platitudes (Oak Openings, pp. 468, 476).

⁶In Cooper's description of the "conversion" experiences of these late sea heroes, there are enough echoes of the mystical experience to justify the phrase "mystical apprehension" in reference to them (see Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness, 4th ed., New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1912, especially pp. 205-06).

and had, indeed, corrupted its very beauties. Consequently, the golgothas of these late heroes always occur in some isolated spot--a raft in the Atlantic, a reef in the Pacific, an island of ice in the Antarctic--where man is pitted, in all his inconsequence, against the elements.

Like the settings, the heroes themselves have changed; they are no longer static characters. Thomas Philbrick has pointed out that Cooper's early heroes are revealed in the course of the narratives, but their personalities and their characters do not change.⁷ In The Spy, the events of the story do not effect any alteration in Peyton Dunwoodie; they serve merely to point up the loyalty and nobility inherent in his character. In The Red Rover, Captain Heidegger's patriotic attachment to the colonies is consistent throughout the novel; his adventures do not alter the nature or the degree of his patriotism--they only discover its depth to the reader. There is no necessity for a metaphysical experience to endow these heroes with spiritual intuition; until the mid-1840's social and moral refinement are sufficient indices for Cooper of the gentleman's character.

Cooper's last four sea heroes are quite different from their earlier counterparts. Miles Wallingford, Mark

⁷James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961), p. 160.

Woolston, Harry Mulford, and Roswell Gardiner move, by the end of their stories, from decidedly secular interests to a demonstrable concern with their spiritual welfares. The change is not a gradual process; rather it is the direct result of the special moment of vision which each of these men experiences following his personal dark night of the soul. These heroes are no more derelict in manners and morals than Cooper's early gentlemen, but prior to their epiphanal experiences, they lack the refinement of spiritual sensibility which Cooper in his final years came to associate with the true gentleman. As a result of their humbling experiences, these protagonists emerge with a new understanding of man's relationship to the world and to God. They eschew neither the material nor the social perquisites of their class, but at the end of their experiences, they can say through spiritual intuition what Lord Pendennyss of Precaution says perhaps only by rote: "It is wonderful how little our happiness depends on a temporal condition" (p. 414)

In order to show how much his heroes are in need of such wisdom, Cooper presents them initially as men who go to sea not for the altruistic reasons characteristic of his earlier sea heroes, but for material gain. Mr. Gray and Edward Griffiths of The Pilot, Harry Wilder and Captain Heidegger of The Red Rover, and Tom Tiller of The Water-Witch use their profession of sailing as a means

of service to the American colonies, as a means of demonstrating the depth of their patriotism. For all the late sea heroes, however, the sea becomes not simply a means of supporting themselves, but also the promise of quick success and wealth. Since they have focused their attention on the secular rather than the sacred, these heroes tend to trust too much in their own decisions and abilities. Only when they find themselves in crisis situations where their human capacities are almost completely useless do they gain the spiritual sensibility which identifies them as ideal gentlemen.

The prototypical hero who experiences this Christian epiphany actually predates the Littlepage trilogy. He is Miles Wallingford, hero of Afloat and Ashore and Miles Wallingford, two novels which Cooper published in 1844 before the anti-rent crisis turned his attention briefly from this new dimension of sensibility. Narrated by the sixty-five-year-old Miles, the novel is characterized by a mellowness of tone absent in the Home novels of 1838 and the Littlepage novels of 1845-46. Miles's complaints about the decline of responsible reporting in the press, of honesty in Wall Street, of manners in society, of reverence in religious worship lack the stridency characteristic of other Cooper heroes. The kind of social criticism which forms nearly the complete text of Home As Found and The Redskins occurs only in a series of asides in the Wallingford novels.

The central theme of the story is the spiritual regeneration of Miles Wallingford. The whole of Afloat and Ashore is taken up with a presentation of adventures which reveal Miles as a socially and morally sensitive young man who is nevertheless almost totally concerned with himself and dependent upon his own abilities. With Rupert Hardinge, son of his guardian, Miles runs away to sea. Acquiring enough money to turn his house at Clawbonny into a "seat" seems more important to him than remaining under the moral instruction of his guardian, the Reverend Hardinge. At sea, Miles is involved in exciting adventures of pursuit and hairbreadth escapes. The John, on which he secures his first berth, is destroyed by currents; his second ship, the Crisis, encounters dangers which result in the death of the Captain and the near loss of the ship.

Throughout all of these dangerous adventures, Miles acquits himself well both as a seaman and an officer. As a result of losses and gains in men and ships, he moves steadily upward in position. When he successfully pilots the Crisis through a narrow passage in the Pacific and then steers the ship safely into a lagoon, Miles--not immodestly, but nevertheless with evident satisfaction--gives himself full credit for his feats: "I was perfectly satisfied with myself. It was owing to my decision and vigilance that the ship was saved, when outside the reef, out of all question; and I think she would have been lost

after she had struck adrift, had I not discovered her present berth" (Afloat and Ashore, p. 246).

In other situations Miles congratulates himself on his abilities: when he regains the Crisis from Smudge and when he retrieves his own ship, the Dawn, from the Englishman, Captain Sennit. Not once in Afloat and Ashore or in the first half of Miles Wallingford does Miles ask for the help of Providence--even in his greatest danger; nor does he credit God with any hand in his salvation from several potentially fatal encounters. While he always behaves as a gentleman, both socially and morally, Miles does not demonstrate in these adventures the spiritual awareness that Cooper was beginning to require in his heroes. For example, when Smudge and his savage band kill Captain Williams on the Crisis and take Miles captive, Miles is sure that death is imminent. Yet even in this extremity he does not place his trust in God. In fact, his thoughts are far from dwelling on the Deity: "For myself, a strange recklessness had taken the place of concern, and I became momentarily indifferent to my fate. I expected to die, and I am now ashamed to confess that my feelings took a direction toward revenge, rather than toward penitence for my past sins" (Afloat and Ashore, p. 213).

What the uninitiated Miles fails to realize is the extent of man's helplessness apart from the aid of

Providence. Because his skill as a seaman and his decisions as an officer extricate him from several close situations, he feels himself all-sufficient. Cooper, however, is careful to undercut Miles's confidence by refusing--in the Wallingford novels and all the other late sea tales--to glamorize the sea or seamanship. Thomas Philbrick demonstrates the sharpness of the contrast between the Wallingford novels and Cooper's earlier romantic sea tales, like The Pilot, The Red Rover, and The Water-Witch: the "glittering ideality and romantic exuberance" of these novels have "become clouded with the complexities of reality." The seaman, the sea, and the ship lack the romantic magnification they receive in the earlier sea tales. The vessels are no longer places of individual freedom and escape; they are microcosms of the world. The seaman is no longer simply a romantic hero; he is a man to whom the voyage is a shaping experience. The sea is not merely a mirror of the passing moods and feelings of the characters; it is an external entity that man must reckon with.⁸

There is a definite thematic function in these changes in the ship, the seaman, and the sea. In The Red Rover and The Water-Witch, the ship provides a magical,

⁸Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction, pp. 144-46.

fantasy world for the hero, a world effectively under the control of the seaman. In Afloat and Ashore, the ships that Miles serves on--the Crisis and the Dawn--are cargo ships, the practical repositories of prosaic articles like flour and sugar. Miles records his first impression of the Crisis: "She was a tight little ship of about four hundred tons, had hoop-pole bulwarks, as I afterward learned, with nettings for hammocks and old junk" (Afloat and Ashore, p. 121). Only the untutored seaman is tempted to romanticize his service aboard such a vessel.

In the earlier sea novels, the Rover and the Skimmer of the Seas seem to be almost supernatural extensions of their vessels, moving and thinking in magical rhythm with their crafts. Miles, however, is a practical seaman; his handling of the ship is skillful, but stops well short of being awe-inspiring. He is no Neptune taming his watery domain. Cooper emphasizes not his god-likeness, but rather his humanness; he is an infinitesimal creature in the universe, a fallible being who fails to recognize and accept his human limitations.

Cooper changes the sea from a consonant extension of the hero in the early romances to a protean, inimical force in the Wallingford novels. The Crisis is powerless before the seemingly deliberate attacks by the elements:

All that day the Crisis stood on the starboard tack, dragging through the raging waters as it might be by violence; and just as night shut in again, she wore

round, once more, with her head to the westward. So far from abating, the wind increased, and toward evening we found it necessary to furl our topsail and fore-course. Mere rag of a sail as the former had been reduced to, with its four reefs in, it was a delicate job to roll it up. . . . The force of the wind on this occasion as much exceeded that in ordinary gales of wind as the force of these had exceeded that of a whole-sail breeze. (Afloat and Ashore, pp. 176-77)

Here is none of the exhilaration common to descriptions of the sea in earlier novels; there is only the threat of destruction from the "vast and angry Atlantic" (p. 97). Cooper means to paint both ship and seaman as powerless victims before the limitless powers of Nature. Recalling his first storm at sea, Miles declares: "I can liken our situation at that fearful moment to the danger of a man who is clinging to a cliff, its summit and safety almost in reach of his hand, with the consciousness that his powers are fast failing him, and he must shortly go down" (p. 97). It is the old Miles Wallingford who says this; the young seaman on his first voyage does not comprehend his own vulnerability.

Both Thomas Philbrick and Donald Ringe see Miles's voyages as a gradual growth to maturity, a maturity, says Philbrick, which "consists in the attainment of a *modus vivendi* that effects a compromise between desire and possibility, between the ideal and the actual."⁹ Miles's

⁹ Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction, p. 161. See Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), p. 108.

comprehension of his vulnerability is not, however, the gradual process that these critics suggest. His voyages are "shaping expeditions" in so far as they develop his abilities as a seaman, but the spiritual sensibility which Miles Wallingford gains comes in an epiphanal moment on a raft in the Atlantic. Cooper spends a novel and a half demonstrating not what Miles is learning, but rather what he is not learning: the extent of his own insignificance. The only time that Miles is seriously concerned with the limitations of mankind is at the death of his sister Grace; but even here, his response is emotional rather than spiritual. Immediately after her death, he mortgages Clawbonny, his family estate, and all his resources to supply the Dawn with a cargo of sugar, gambling that its disposition will bring him a wealth he does not really need.

Only when he is brought face to face with his own vulnerability, when he is stripped of everything of emotional and material value does Miles gain spiritual sensibility. In a storm in the Atlantic, Miles loses first his friend and mate, Moses Marble, then his faithful servant, Neb, and finally his ship and its cargo. Only when he is thus utterly alone and helpless, deprived of his ship, his crew, his friends and his home does Miles turn to God: "I knelt and prayed to that dread Being, with whom, it now

appeared to me, I stood alone in the center of the universe" (Miles Wallingford, p. 321). Cooper describes Miles's epiphany in terms that are strongly suggestive of a mystical experience. Once he begins to accept his own helplessness and isolation, Miles looks upon the ocean not as an "angry cauldron," but rather as a reflection of God's grace; "I fancied that it was faintly reflecting the gracious countenance of its divine Creator, in a smile of beneficent love. I felt my heart soften, as I gazed around me, and I fancied heavenly music was singing the praises of God on the face of the great deep. Then I knelt in the top and prayed" (Miles Wallingford, p. 317). Soon after this moment of illumination, Miles falls into a deep sleep, which acts as a kind of spiritual restorative; he has never known, he says, a sleep more "profound and refreshing" (Miles Wallingford, p. 320).¹⁰

Once Miles gains this spiritual sensibility, his fortunes improve almost immediately. He is reunited with Marble and Neb; and even though his ship is lost, he returns home to reclaim Clawbonny from a usurper and to inherit his cousin's estate of two hundred thousand dollars. Moreover, he wins Lucy Hardinge and establishes a responsible

¹⁰Evelyn Underhill describes this recognition of the reflection of God in nature as typical of the mystical experience: "To see God in nature, to attain a radiant consciousness of the 'otherness' of natural things, is the simplest and commonest form of illumination," p. 282.

home at Clawbonny--instead of the impressive "seat" he had earlier desired.

Cooper ends his earlier novels, both land and sea stories, with a summary of the hero's assumption of his social and political responsibilities. Oliver and Elizabeth Effingham accept the leadership of Templeton in The Pioneers; Wharton Dunwoodie appears as the noble continuation of the patriotism of his parents in The Spy; Duncan Uncas Middleton of The Prairie assumes positions of governmental responsibility; Edward Griffith in The Pilot commands a ship until the close of the war, then settles down to the "conjoint duties of a husband and good citizen" (Pilot, p. 440). Even the Red Rover emerges as a selfless patriot, rivaled in Cooper's novels only by Harvey Birch. Cooper is careful at the close of these earlier novels to re-emphasize the social and moral sensibility displayed by his heroes throughout their stories.

In the later sea novels, it is the Christian sensibility of the heroes and heroines that Cooper focuses on at the close of the stories. Miles Wallingford's final comments about himself and his family deal not only with their relationship to society, but also with their relationship to God: "My family, like its female head, has ever been deeply impressed by religion; but it is religion in its most pleasing aspect; religion that has no taint of puritanism, and in which sin and innocent gayety are never

confounded" (p. 453). Miles denigrates that "class of theologians" who "have regulated their moral discipline solely as if, in their hearts, they placed all their reliance on the efficacy of a school of good works." He carefully points out that the religion of his own family has a more intuitive basis: faith (p. 453).

In The Crater (1847), the novel which immediately follows the Littlepage trilogy, Cooper reverts to the theme of Christian humility central to the Wallingford novels. Having just completed a series of novels in which demagogic levelers are the prime villains, Cooper cannot bring himself to abandon this culprit; but in The Crater, he measures the enemy by new criteria. In the Home novels and the Littlepage trilogy, it is the social and political conceit of the Dodges and the Newcomes that Cooper criticizes. In The Crater, the symptoms of the disease are the same: the levelers refuse to recognize or to respect superiority in manners, background, or education. The cause of the malady, however, is no longer merely the desire for social or political "equality"; rather it is spiritual pride: "an exaggerated view of self . . . and an almost total forgetfulness of God" (p. 451).

The first half of the novel is a Robinson Crusoe adventure narrating the event of the shipwreck which places Mark Woolston and his shipmate, Bob Betts, on a barren reef in the Pacific. Partly with the help of Bob

and partly alone--after Bob and the pinnacle they are building are washed away in a gale--Miles transforms the crater into a luxurious New Eden. The parallels between this island paradise and America are obvious throughout the story. The second half of the novel concerns Mark's peopling of the island with hand-picked Americans, their growth to prosperity under Mark's governorship, their moral decline, and the cataclysmic destruction that follows in the wake of the spiritual pride of the demagogic infiltrators.

The epiphanal experience by which Mark gains Christian humility occurs, like that of Miles Wallingford, when Mark finds himself utterly alone. Having married Bridget Yardley without the approval of either family involved--an act for which Cooper's disapproval is clear--Mark ships off in the Rancocus to await his and Bridget's coming of age. Like Miles Wallingford's, Mark's choice of profession is not prompted by patriotism, but rather by the desire for material gain. Since Mark is to assume the high position of governor of an island, however, Cooper invests him from the beginning with a little more spiritual awareness than he allows Miles. Soon after he and Betts land on the reef--a forbidding coral island of dreariness, nakedness, and utter desolation (p. 57)--Mark realizes even more fully than Betts that only through the aid of Providence will they survive.

Mark's perception is only one of the characteristics which separate him from Betts. Even on a reef with a population of two, social and intellectual distinctions quickly appear. Betts, recognizing Mark's superiority, insists on deferring to his companion in matters of sleeping quarters and decision making. Mark magnanimously refuses the outward distinctions, but in their modes of worship and in their leisure activities, Cooper underscores the differences between them. Mark--an Episcopalian, of course--spends the first Sabbath reading aloud the morning service from beginning to end, while Betts sits silently by with his hat on--a hat that he is careful to remove when he enters Mark's cabin on the Rancocus. In his leisure time, Mark conveys all his books, his flute, and writing materials to a tent on the Summit for the purpose of study and appreciation; Betts, on the other hand, spends his leisure time fishing (p. 108).

For all his accomplishments, Mark lacks the degree of Christian sensibility necessary for the complete gentleman. Until Betts and the pinnace are washed away in the storm, all of Mark's projects on the Reef are successful, made so largely through his own efforts. He secures the Rancocus so that there is no immediate danger of death or starvation; his attempts at vegetating the barren reef are enormously successful; the framework of a boat which the two men find in the Rancocus grows into a

promising means of escaping their isolation. Although Mark several times acknowledges the hand of Providence in their good fortune, he does not come face to face with the extent of his own dependence on supernatural aid until he loses his sole companion and with him any means of returning to civilization.

As he does in the case of Miles Wallingford, Cooper describes Mark's attainment of Christian humility as a process that transcends intellect. Losing sight of Bob and the Neshamony, Mark is overcome by a sense of complete isolation. Almost before he has time to realize the magnitude of his situation, however, Mark is stricken by a fever which levels him for days. He lingers in a kind of trance, sometimes unconscious and at other times painfully aware of his vulnerability, of "the horrors of his situation" (p. 133). Cooper's description of Mark's actions as he recovers are strongly suggestive of Christian mysticism. His first nourishment is bread (pilot's biscuit) and wine; he approaches these substances not with ravenous physical hunger, but rather with a kind of ritualistic reverence. In the middle of this Eucharistic-like meal, Mark pauses to "address himself to God, with thanks for having spared his life until reason was restored" (p. 134).¹¹

¹¹Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism, points out that "for the Christian mystics, the sacraments and mysteries of faith have always provided a point d'appui; and these symbols often play a large part in the production of their ecstasies," p. 435.

Mark's second act is to bathe himself and put on fresh garments. Again Cooper's language is significant:

The invalid again felt like a new man! It is scarcely possible to express the change that came over his feelings, when he found himself purified from the effects of so long confinement in a feverish bed. . . . He put on the clean, fresh shirt. . . . It was half an hour before he moved again, though all the time experiencing the benefits of the nourishment taken, and the purification undergone. (p. 137)

Following these ritualistic acts, Mark sleeps again; this time, however, it is the "sweet sleep" of the purified rather than the agonized sleep of a soul in its dark night. Upon awakening, Mark is greeted by Kitty, the goat taken from the Rancocus onto the reef; his reaction to this beast recalls the Ancient Mariner's blessing the "slimy sea creatures" in Coleridge's poem:

Mark held out his hand, and spoke to his companion, for such she was, and thought she was rejoiced to hear his voice again, and to be allowed to lick his hand. There was great consolation in this mute intercourse, poor Mark feeling the want of sympathy so much as to find a deep pleasure in this proof of affection even in a brute. (p. 137)

This positive response to a lowly fellow creature acts as an effective metaphor for Mark's newly acquired Christian humility and his "radiant consciousness of the 'otherness' of natural things."¹²

Mark emerges from this purifying experience with a degree of Christian sensibility which he has not exhibited earlier in the novel. Although he has been

¹Underhill, p. 282.

carefully educated on the subject of religion, he now begins to inquire into his relationship to God in a new spirit of humility. His altered approach suggests the final mystical state of Union with the Divine:

. . . the grave circumstances in which he was now placed contributed largely to the clearness of his views of the necessity of preparing for the final change. Cut off, as he was from all communion with his kind; cast on what was, when he first knew it, literally a barren rock in the midst of the vast Pacific Ocean, Mark found himself, by a very natural operation of causes, in much closer communion with his Creator. . . . There was little to divert his thoughts from their true course; and the very ills that pressed upon him, became so many guides to his gratitude by showing, through the contrasts, the many blessings which had been left him by the mercy of the hand that had struck him. (p. 142)

In his early studies Mark had acquired a liberal understanding of astronomy, a science which appealed primarily to his intellect. After his "conversion," he looks upon the heavens in a new attitude. Again, Cooper's diction suggests the attempt of the human to unite with the Divine:

Hours at a time did Mark linger on the Summit, studying the stars in the clear, transparent atmosphere of the tropics, his spirit struggling the while to get into closer communion with that dread Being which had produced all these mighty results; among which the existence of the earth, its revolutions, its heats and colds, its misery and happiness, are but specks in the incidents of the universe. Previously to this period, he had looked into these things from curiosity and a love of science; now, they impressed him with the deepest sense of the power and wisdom of the Deity, and caused him the better to understand his own position in the scale of created beings. (p. 144)

Having studied the creation in this new attitude of humility, Mark is awed rather than terrified when volcanic action produces a new island almost literally before his eyes. This exhibition of the power of Nature fills Mark's soul with adoration and reverence: "It did not alarm him, but rather tended to quiet his longings to quit the place; for he who lives amid such scenes feels that he is so much nearer to the arm of God than those who dwell in uniform society" (p. 172). This knowledge that God is everywhere directs not only the frequency but also the nature of Mark's worship. His daily practice of "communing in spirit directly with his Creator" assumes a more intuitive, less formal character: he worships with "such yearning of soul, and such feelings of love and reverence, as an active and living faith can alone, by the aid of the Divine Spirit, awaken in the human breast" (p. 179)

In the Wallingford novels, Miles acquires this Christian humility three-fourths of the way through the second volume. Mark's experience occurs a third of the way into The Crater. It is necessary for Mark to gain this Christian sensibility in preparation for becoming the governor of the Eden he has tended. In no other novel does Cooper prepare his hero so carefully to assume a public office. In the earlier novels, Cooper stresses background, education, wealth and morality as the major

qualifications for leadership; but in Mark Woolston, even more than in Miles Wallingford, it is the apprehension of Christian humility which sets the gentleman above his peers. Soon after Mark's Reef and Vulcan's Peak are peopled by a few colonists--hand-picked for their moral superiority--Mark is unanimously chosen as governor for life.

Under Mark's humble but sagacious leadership, the island paradise prospers. At the base of Mark's political philosophy lie a number of singularly Cooperian beliefs: the significance of property with "a direct personal interest in both its accumulation and its preservation"; the inviolability of individuality as opposed to the "tyranny of the majority"; a reverence for the great moral truths that are not to be set aside with impunity by corrupting visionaries (Chapter 20). Mark is the very epitome of Christian humility, but he realizes that this very humility, along with his background and earlier experiences on the reef, qualifies him as the best leader of the colony. The early colonists, schooled by Mark's Christian leadership, agree with him. Their attitude is best exemplified in Bob Betts, whose deference to the governor is always exemplary, despite the singular relationship the two men enjoy in their initial isolation on the reef. Betts finally even requests to be relieved of serving on the Council of Nine because he realizes that the

other eight members, sharing a common background, exhibit an intellectual and social refinement unattainable by him.¹³

After the "Pirate-War," in which the colonists successfully defeat the native Waally and his followers, the moral tenor of the island group changes. Demagogues infiltrate the reef and Vulcan's Peak in the person of dissenting (i.e., non-Episcopal) ministers; lawyers whose very appearance in the colony seems to set neighbor against neighbor over imagined wrongs; and newspaper editors who, through the vehicle of "The Crater Truth-Teller," convince the colonists that the islanders--who never pay a cent in taxes--are woefully overtaxed. The result of all this demagogic infiltration is that Mark and the Council are unseated--not by open rebellion, but by introduction of a "rule" that no public official may serve more than five years. Mark is replaced by John Pennock, one of the original colonists who is seduced by ambition and the wily flattery of the demagogues.

In the Home novels, Wyandotté, and the Littlepage trilogy, Cooper criticizes the demagogic levelers primarily for their political and social shortcomings. The Crater was written, however, at a time in Cooper's life when he had come to feel that there was an even more serious and

¹³This Council of Nine, being directed in the early days of the reef's history by Christian teachings, stands in sharp contrast to the infamous Council of Three in The Bravo.

more basic failing at the root of demagoguery: the failure of Christian sensibility. Consequently, he casts his description of the degeneration of the Crater colonists in terms different from those he uses to describe Steadfast Dodge, Joel Strides, and the Newcomes. He says of the Craterians:

the ancient humility seemed suddenly to disappear; and in its place a vain-glorious estimate of themselves and of their prowess arose among the people. . . . The tendency . . . was to place self before God, and not only to believe that they merited all they received, but that they actually created a good share of it. (pp. 450-51)

Stripped of all his powers of leadership and in danger of losing his property as well, Mark and his family and a few of their closest friends sail to America. When they return some six months later, Vulcan's Peak and Mark's Reef have been sunk, by the judgment of God, beneath the sea. All that remains of the island group is the very summit of Vulcan's peak, topped by a solitary tree planted there by Mark himself to serve as a signal. Cooper makes certain that his reader will not miss the significance of that promontory, so much reduced from what it had been:

It might be said to resemble . . . that sublime rock, which is recognized as a part of the "everlasting hills," in Cole's series of noble landscapes that is called the "March of Empire": ever the same amid the changes of time and civilization, and decay, there it was the apex of the Peak: naked, storm-beaten, and familiar to the eye, though surrounded no longer by the many delightful objects which had once been seen in its neighborhood. (p. 479)

The Americans who survive the catastrophe are those like Mark Woolston who recognize man's flawed nature and

who have intuited the extent of man's dependence on a higher Being. For those who lack this kind of sensibility, Cooper foresees only dire calamity. In a letter to Anson Judd Upton, dated December 16, 1848, Cooper declares: "Divine Providence reigns over even majorities, and the 'vox dei' may interpose after all, to save us from its miserable counterfeit, the 'vox populi.'"¹⁴ The supposition, however, had already hardened into reality in Cooper's myth of America's creation and destruction:

Let those who would substitute the voice of the created for that of the Creator, who shout "the people, the people," instead of hymning the praises of their God, who vainly imagine that the masses are sufficient for all things, remember their insignificance and tremble. They are but mites amid millions of other mites, that the goodness of Providence has produced for its own wise ends; their boasted countries, with their vaunted climates and productions, have temporary possessions of but small portions of a globe that floats, a point, in space, following the course pointed out by an invisible finger, and which will one day be suddenly struck out of its orbit, as it was originally put there by the hand that made it. Let that dread Being, then, be never made to act a second part in human affairs, or the rebellious vanity of our race imagine that either numbers, or capacity, or success, or power in arms, is aught more than a short-lived gift of His beneficence, to be resumed when his purposes are accomplished. (pp. 481-82)

This final paragraph of The Crater is Cooper's jeremiad not only to the failure of Christian sensibility in America but also to the lessening of his own faith in the ability

¹⁴The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper, ed. James Franklin Beard, V (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), 394.

of the principles of democracy to save man from his own flawed nature.

Jack Tier, Cooper's next sea novel, offers no brighter picture of American attitudes and practices. In fact, in this novel, often ignored or lightly dismissed by Cooper critics, the author carries the "deromanticizing" of sea and seamen to its ultimate extreme. Jack Tier goes much further than the Wallingford novels in stripping seamanship of its glamor and its automatic association with moral superiority. George Dekker and Donald Ringe have recognized that this reworking lies at the core of the novel's meaning. Dekker identifies in the story a "complete inversion of values"; Ringe views the novel as a commentary on the "decline of value in modern life."¹⁵ More than this, the novel portrays the dangers inherent in a failure of Christian sensibility.

In his deliberate reduction of the setting and the characters in Jack Tier, Cooper is not attempting to capitalize on an earlier success. Rather he is shifting the focus of his narrative from the kind of social and moral sensibility exemplified in the superior seamanship and the patriotic attachments of Harry Wilder and the Red Rover to the spiritual sensibility which Captain Stephen Spike denies and Harry Mulford gains in Jack Tier.

¹⁵Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: the American Scott (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1967), p. 123; Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 131.

Both the Molly Swash and her captain, Stephen Spike, are in every way the opposite of Captain Heidegger and the Dolphin of The Red Rover. The Rover's ship is a wonderful craft whose sailing abilities strike awe into her own crew as well as her observers. The Rover's cabin is decorated with a plush luxuriance which, as Thomas Philbrick has shown, recalls Lambro's house in Canto III of Don Juan and the interior of the harem in Canto V (stanzas 93 and 94).¹⁶ The cut-glass mirrors, the rich hangings, the silver candlesticks, the velvet couch and blue silk divan (pp. 73-74), provide the perfect accouterments for the dashing, handsome Rover.

The Molly Swash--her name is as commonplace as her face--is a relic of the War of 1812, too old to be insured and characterized by none of the glamor attendant upon the Dolphin or the Ariel of the Water-Witch. The crew, like the ship and its captain, has "lost the elasticity of youth." The female in disguise is no longer the sprite-like Roderick of Red Rover or the beautiful, effervescent Eudora of Water-Witch. Rather she is Jack Tier (actually Molly Swash, the long-deserted wife of Stephen Spike), a "little dumpling-looking person" with a cracked voice. Everywhere, as Thomas Philbrick notes, Cooper insists on the "mood of shabby senescence."¹⁷

¹⁶Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction, p. 61.

¹⁷Ibid.

While the Red Rover is handsome, debonair, and Byronic in appearance, Stephen Spike, a man of "coarse and vulgar feature" (p. 4), is a "short squab figure" with "stumpy, solid legs" (p. 9). The Rover is a nautical rebel only because loyalty to the colonies has forced him to this position--he fought a duel with a superior officer who insulted his country. Stephen Spike is a traitor to his country, selling gunpowder to the Mexicans during the Mexican-American war. The Rover, whatever his profession, is irrefutably a gentleman toward the ladies; he is deeply hurt when Wilder questions his motives toward Gertrude Grayson, the heroine, vowing that he would kill both himself and Gertrude before "harm should come to that fair innocent" (p. 312). Stephen Spike, however, lusts not only after Rose Budd's fortune but also after the young girl herself.

In The Red Rover, Captain Heidegger is appalled at Wilder's suggestion that he and the Rover take the ladies and desert the Dolphin and its men: "Lawless, in the opinion of the world, have I long been; but a traitor to my faith and plighted word, never!" (p. 316). Stephen Spike not only deserts many of his own men when the Swash is going down, but he does not hesitate to push others over the side of the raft when the load must be lightened. Moreover, he consigns Rose's aunt and servant to the same fate. Indeed, he even instructs the boatswain to cut off the

hands of Mrs. Budd as she clings to the side of the raft. At the end of The Red Rover, Captain Heidegger dies triumphant, having devoted his life to the service of his country in the Revolution. The captain of the Molly Swash dies an unrepentant sinner, a picture of "remorse, suspended over the abyss of eternity in hopeless dread" (p. 476).

Cooper's purpose is not merely the deromanticizing of ship and seaman. What he wishes to demonstrate with the shabby, aging Molly Swash and the greedy, unregenerate Stephen Spike is man's brutish nature. Unsupported by moral sensibility, Stephen Spike is little better than an animal. The professional skill which has served in Cooper's earlier fiction as a metaphor for moral character does not save Stephen Spike from a failure of sensibility. Indeed, Spike puts his skill to effective use in escaping the authorities and in the perpetration of his wicked deeds.

While Spike represents man in all the unregenerate brutishness of his nature, the hero Harry Mulford, first mate of the Molly Swash, exemplifies the Cooper gentleman who has yet to gain the Christian humility necessary to complete his moral portrait. Even poorer than Miles Wallingford, Harry feels economically compelled to serve on Spike's ship, even though he suspects that there is something amiss in Spike's actions. While Harry lacks

the Byronic glamor of the Rover, he shares with Henry Wilder, technical hero of Red Rover, the well-developed sense of propriety and the refinement of manners typical of the Cooper hero.

Even more important, Harry Mulford possesses the kind of skill in seamanship which functions in Henry Wilder as an appropriate symbol of the hero's moral exemplitude. By 1847, this professional acumen is no longer a sufficient indicator of the hero's moral health. Resourceful and able as he is aboard the Molly Swash, Harry is finally placed in a crisis situation comparable to the experiences of Miles Wallingford and Mark Woolston.

Trying to escape the machinations of Spike, whose sights are set on Rose and her small fortune, Mulford--with Rose, Mrs. Budd, Biddy Noon, and Jack Tier--sets sail for Key West in the ship of Señor Don Juan Montefalderon, the Mexican patriot to whom Spike is selling gunpowder. As a result of Mrs. Budd's refusal to call the sleeping Mulford for his watch, the schooner capsizes and the lifeboat is lost. The group find themselves marooned on a slowly sinking capsized vessel with no water and only a few mouthfuls of food. Stranded atop their inevitably diminishing world, they are like miniscule particles of humanity briefly dotting the vast expanse of the ocean.

Reduced to such straits, Harry can no longer depend on his professional skill. Yet, even at the entreaty of

Rose Budd, whom he loves, Harry cannot bring himself to "humble his proud spirit and place himself at her side, and ask that succor from God which was so much needed, and which indeed it began most seriously to appear that God alone could yield" (p. 236). Cooper does not try to minimize his hero's lack of Christian humility: "The young mate did not comply, for his pride of profession and of manhood offered themselves as stumbling-blocks to prevent submission to his secret wishes. . . . He had been taught to believe that the Anglo-Saxon mariner did not call on Hercules, on every occasion of difficulty and distress that occurred . . . but he put his own shoulder to the wheel, confident that Hercules would not forget to help him who knew how to help himself" (pp. 236-37).

As he sits alone on the watch that night, however, and realizes the enormity of their situation, Harry's proud spirit is at last humbled and he begins the acquisition of that same spiritual sensibility that comes to Miles Wallingford and Mark Woolston:

It was now that Mulford found a moment for prayer, and, seated on the keel, he called on the Divine aid, in a fervent but silent petition to God, to put away this trial from the youthful and beautiful Rose, at least, though he himself perished. It was the first prayer that Mulford had made in many months, or since he had joined the Swash--a craft in which that duty was seldom thought of. (pp. 238-39)

Significantly, once Mulford humbles himself and utters a selfless prayer for another, the ocean assumes a calmer

aspect, "as the gentle waves rolled at intervals against the weatherside of the wreck" (p. 238). Soon after Mulford's revivifying and purifying prayer, it rains for the first time since the beginning of their ordeal. Literally, the water is a life-giving substance since it is their first liquid refreshment; symbolically, the rain represents for Mulford, as it does for Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, the visitation of grace upon the regenerate soul. The simple-minded Biddy Noon says more than she means when she repeats over and over: "Wather is a blessed thing . . . a blessed, blessed thing is wather!" (p. 248).

Mulford's newly acquired humility is deepened when, realizing that the wreck will sink shortly, he decides to try to reach the boat floating at some distance from the overturned schooner. His own insufficiency is graphically underlined when he is followed by one shark, then surrounded by dozens. In this trial, however, Mulford's false pride is no longer operative; he does not hesitate to pray in supplication and in thanksgiving (pp. 253-65). Although Mulford's "conversion" lacks the mystical aura and the dramatic impact of Miles Wallingford's and Mark Woolston's, Harry serves, nevertheless, as one more example of Cooper's "new" gentleman: a man in whom spiritual sensibility is as fully developed as social refinement and moral philosophy.

In The Sea Lions (1849), his final sea novel, Cooper presents his most overt and most thorough treatment of spiritual sensibility. Cooper first identifies his theme in the Preface: "It is the want of a due sense of humility, and a sad misconception of what we are, and for what we are created, that misleads us in the due estimate of our own insignificance, as compared with the majesty of God" (p. iv). In this novel, seemingly tangential adventures and occurrences are actually crucial to the essential theme. Even the love story, sometimes merely a parallel action in Cooper's novels, is integrally bound up with the change in Roswell Gardiner's religious thinking: the complication turns upon his failure of Christian humility, and the resolution--his marriage to Mary Pratt--is the direct result of his epiphanal experience in the Antarctic. The deprivation and suffering, like the beauty and terror of the Antarctic, are significant influences in Gardiner's "conversion."

As in the Wallingford novels, The Crater, and Jack Tier, Cooper refuses to romanticize the sea or seamanship. There is no more altruism in Roswell Gardiner's voyage to Sealer's Island than there is in that of Daggett, captain of the Vineyard Sea Lion. Gardiner sails the Sea Lion of Oyster Pond as the representative of the greedy, hypocritical Deacon Pratt; Jason Daggett sails the Sea Lion of Martha's Vineyard in an attempt to discover a treasure

located and mapped by a relative who dies in Oyster Pond. Daggett attaches himself to Gardiner because he suspects that Deacon Pratt has gained possession of the map and has given it to Roswell.

Yet, there are essential differences between the two men. In his discussion of the Doppelganger relationship between Gardiner and Daggett, Thomas Philbrick discovers an impressive number of parallels in the men and their ships--lookalikes, each bearing the name of Sea Lion.¹⁸ Roswell Gardiner, however, is Cooper's hero; in that role, he shares with his predecessors qualities not present in Daggett. He is an abler seaman than Daggett--although Cooper praises Roswell's professional abilities less than Miles Wallingford praises his own. Most important, he shares with his prototypes both social and moral sensibility. There is a recognizably Cooperian delicacy in his behavior toward Mary Pratt, the heroine. In addition, while greed is Jason Daggett's motive for refusing to become separated from Roswell in their journey, Gardiner feels a definite moral responsibility to aid and support the Vineyard Sea Lion and her captain (pp. 235, 255). Many of the parallels which Philbrick insists upon are present in the novel, but their purpose is not so much that of uniting the two men as "unregenerates," but rather of placing in the boldest

¹⁸ Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction, pp. 250-59.

relief the most essential difference between them: Roswell has the intellectual and moral capacity for regeneration; Daggett does not.

Roswell's refusal to compromise his intelligence makes him, like Raoul Yvard of Wing and Wing, an attractive hero. Gardiner believes in God, but he also believes that God's highest gift to man is reason. It is, in fact, the exercise of his reason which keeps Roswell from accepting the divinity and the crucifixion of Christ. He tells Mary Pratt: "I confess it does appear to me illogical, unreasonable--I scarce know how to designate what I mean--but, improbable, that God should suffer himself, or his Son, to be crucified by beings that he himself created, or that he should feel a necessity for any such course, in order to redeem beings he had himself brought into existence" (p. 103).

In accusing Roswell of worshipping his reason, Mary pinpoints the vital failure in Roswell's thinking: his refusal to give any weight to intuition. In The Sea Lions, more than any other novel, Cooper insists upon intuition as the primary index to Christian gentlemanliness. At two strategic points in The Sea Lions, Cooper is careful to stress that faith, and not reason, is the vehicle by which man arrives at spiritual sensibility. As he is about to embark on the journey that becomes a spiritual

odyssey, Roswell hears from Mary Pratt the role that faith plays in the Christian's life:

" . . . to me, it seems very plain that the instant circumstances lead us beyond the limits of our means of comprehension, we are to believe in, and not to reason on, revelation. The whole history of Christianity teaches this. . . and all the lessons it teaches are to raise faith, and faith in the Redeemer, high above all other attainments, as the one great acquisition that includes and colors every other. When such is the fact, the heart does not make a stumbling block of everything that the head cannot understand. . . . I do not pretend to understand why such a sacrifice should be necessary, but I believe it, and feel it." (pp. 102-03)

The second instance in which Cooper emphasizes the role of faith in Christian regeneration occurs when Roswell is perhaps more disposed to accept intuition as a plausible component of religion. Trapped at Sealer's Island during the long Antarctic winter, the crews of the two Sea Lions can do little except to try to survive the intense cold. Daggett and his men take refuge in the cabin of the Vineyard Sea Lion while Roswell's men live in a house constructed on the island. Roswell spends much of the time reading the Bible, especially the passages marked by Mary Pratt, relating to the Divinity of Christ. He has yet another tutor, however, in the person of Stephen Stimson, the old sealer who accompanies Roswell on the voyage. One-dimensional as Stimson is, he does represent the kind of simple, natural, intuitive approach to religion that Roswell Gardiner must develop. When Gardiner questions him about the source of his belief in the divinity of

Jesus, Stimson's reply is revelatory. He tells Roswell that his mother died when he was very young and he has had little to do with parsons: "Faith tells me to believe this, and Faith comes from God" (p. 367).

Even in this last sea novel, however, Cooper does not forego a certain reservation typical of his later writings: members of the lower class are limited not only in their social refinement, but also in their capacity for religious sensibility. Vital as Stephen Stimson is in the spiritual regeneration of Roswell Gardiner, Cooper insists at several points that Stephen's ability to instruct Gardiner is limited. Cooper attributes much of Roswell's tolerance of Stimson to courtesy rather than acquiescence to Stephen's methods of theological argument. Gardiner is sometimes moved to smile at Stephen's simple reasoning, "aware that it would not be just to hold any creed responsible for the manner in which a person like Stimson defended it" (p. 377). Cooper is not being sarcastic when he says, "Roswell certainly did not converse with Stimson in the expectation of being much instructed" (p. 379). It is clear that in Cooper's view, Roswell's manners and intellect combined with Christian intuition will be a much more desirable combination than Stephen's simple faith.

What finally precipitates Roswell Gardiner's epiphanal experience is a realization of his own insufficiency and

and infinitesimal stature as he stands alone before the massive frozen Antarctic world and gazes up at the majestic heavens above him:

. . . the stars gave forth a brightness that is rarely seen. . . . Each and all of these sublime emblems of the power of God were twinkling like bright torches glowing in space. . . . As the animalculae of the atmospheric air bear a proportion to things visible, so would this throng seem to bear a proportion to our vague estimates of the spiritual hosts. . . . All this Roswell was very capable of feeling, and in some measure of appreciating, and never before had he been made so conscious of his own insignificance, as he became while looking on the firmament that night. (p. 378)

It is worth noting that Cooper attributes Roswell's new understanding to his feeling and appreciation rather than to his reason. The result of this intuition is a sense of humility, the "first healthful symptom that shows itself in every man's moral regeneration" (p. 379).

Gardiner, recalling Stimson's comment that "A Deity I could understand would be no God for me" (p. 380), realizes that the refusal to accept such an incomprehensible God has deprived him of the one prerequisite for Christian sensibility: faith. Once he accepts the miraculous as true, Gardiner looks upon his former insistence on "logic" as thoroughly illogical. The rain that falls as a sign of Harry Mulford's regeneration in Jack Tier is replaced in The Sea Lions with a symbol more appropriate to the setting of the narrative: warmth. Cooper says of Roswell in his hour of revelation: "So intense were his feelings, so active the workings of his mind, that he was quite

insensible to the intensity of the cold; . . . his frame actually set at defiance a temperature that might otherwise have chilled it. . . . 'I do not feel it cold, Stephen [says Roswell]. On the contrary, I'm in a pleasant glow. . . . Tis strange! I do not feel it so very cold'" (pp. 381, 383, 384). Cooper could have contrived no more fitting climax to Gardiner's epiphanal experience.

The warmth functions as an appropriate symbol of his newly-acquired faith. The coup de maître lies, however, in having the super-rationalist insist--even in the face of Stimson's empirical declaration, "The mercury is still in the ball"--that he absolutely does not feel the cold.

Significantly, just as Roswell Gardiner is being warmed by his faith, Jason Daggett is freezing to death. The physical fire has gone out in the Vineyard Sea Lion's cabin while Roswell's fires of faith are being kindled. It is at this point that Jason Daggett emerges most clearly as a foil for Roswell Gardiner. Gardiner's interest in material profits lessens in proportion to his acquisition of Christian sensibility; Daggett, even as he is dying, continues to cling to his ship and the promise of sealing profits. When the seals return as the weather begins to improve Gardiner sees the occurrence as a signal of God's favor; the dying Daggett, with a greedy gleam in his eye, complains: "It's a pity, Gar'ner, that we have no craft

ready for the work. . . . At this early time in the season, a large ship might be filled!" (p. 407). Daggett dies without the spiritual sensibility that renews and sustains his "brother" captain.

Just as Miles Wallingford, Mark Woolston, and Harry Mulford become more devoutly Christian as a result of their regeneration experiences, so Roswell Gardiner exhibits an increased awareness of both his own insignificance and the grandeur of the universe. Cooper, as usual, is explicit in painting his hero's altered outlook, especially in response to the narrow escapes encountered by the reconstructed Oyster Pond Sea Lion on its homeward voyage:

These escapes made a deep impression on Roswell. Until the past winter, he had been accustomed to look upon things and events as matters of course. This vacant indifference, so common to men in prosperity, was extended even to the sublimest exhibition of the Almighty power. . . . Now, how differently did he look upon natural objects, and their origin! . . . No star seemed less than what science has taught us that it is; and the power of the Dread Being who had created all, who governed all, and who was judge of all, became an inseparable subject of contemplation, as he looked upon the least of his works. Feelings thus softened and tempered by humility, easily led their subject to the reception of those articles of the Christian faith. (p. 424)

Like Cooper's other regenerated heroes, Roswell Gardiner does not abandon his secular responsibilities.¹⁹

¹⁹Interestingly enough, Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism, says that the records of the mysticism of the West are always records of "human activity"; a motion of retreat and return "remains the true final stage," pp. 210-11. Thus Cooper has his heroes return from their epiphanal experiences chastened, but readier than ever to accept their secular responsibilities.

On his return to Oyster Pond he locates and secures the treasure Deacon Pratt has sent him after. He gives a careful and exact accounting to the dying Pratt of all the costs and profits of the sealing voyage. Although he feels the terrible irony of the avaricious Deacon's dying just as he reaches for the bag of gold doubloons, Gardiner is careful to see that Mary Pratt is not cheated out of her inheritance by greedy relatives. This inheritance--a much more considerable fortune than anyone supposed the Deacon to possess--becomes Roswell's upon his marriage to Mary.

Each of Cooper's regenerated sea heroes is "rewarded" in a similar manner. Miles not only retrieves his own property and inherits a considerable fortune from his cousin, but his marriage to Lucy Hardinge brings its own ample monetary reward. Mark Woolston's oil and whaling ventures make him a rich man, while Harry Mulford gains Rose Budd's comfortable, if not huge, fortune upon their marriage. Ironically, these heroes, whose epiphanal experiences are designed to divest them of an excessive interest in the secular, end up being showered with worldly goods by their chastiser!

In these final novels, Cooper chooses the sea for his setting not for the glamor it provides in his earlier narratives, but rather for the evidence it offers of God's omnipotence and man's dependence. In contrast to his earlier

treatment of sailing, these later novels show not what the ship and the seaman can do, but rather what they cannot do in the face of the elements. The sea serves as a logical setting and the ship as a practical vehicle for removing man to a position where his own abilities and intelligence afford him little or no aid. Only in such an extremity does the Cooper hero become receptive to the process of spiritual regeneration; and only in this receptive mood does his moral sensibility expand into spiritual intuitiveness.

These four sea novels comprise the final testament of both Cooper's disillusionment in and his hope for mankind. Cooper was finally forced into the reluctant admission that neither the principles of American democracy nor the positive attributes of the landed gentleman were sufficient to insure man's happiness or his spiritual well-being. The hope that Cooper had nourished for perfection in the new world dimmed as that world succumbed more and more to greed and self-centeredness. In his last years Cooper came to feel that spiritual humility was the one final ingredient necessary to complete the portrait of the Christian gentleman in his novels. Significantly, the Christian epiphany experienced by Cooper's last four sea heroes finds its counterpart in Cooper's own life. Although he was always devoted to the philosophy and the

practices of the Episcopal church, it was only three months before his death that Cooper submitted himself to his own epiphanal experience: in July, 1851, Cooper was confirmed into the Episcopal church by his wife's brother, Bishop De Lancey.

CONCLUSION

James Fenimore Cooper's philosophical approach to sensibility sets him apart from the sentimental novelists, for whom sensibility functions primarily as a vehicle for sentimentality. Cooper's handling of sensibility looks forward to Henry James rather than backward to William Hill Brown and Susanna Rowson. While one would hesitate to claim a direct influence of the romanticist upon the realist, there is a distinct correspondence between Cooper and James in their use of sensibility as a means of measuring character. Like Cooper, James uses the exercise of the moral imagination as an infallible indicator of moral superiority. In their finest moments, James's heroes surprise us with an exquisite sense of selflessness. In The American, Christopher Newman refuses to use the incriminating paper which might force the Bellegardes to allow Claire to marry him. At the end of The Ambassadors, Lambert Strether rejects Maria Gostrey's proffer of affection: "I must go. . . . To be right. . . . That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have gotten anything for myself."¹

¹The Novels and Tales of Henry James, New York edition, 22 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 326.

In Cooper's novels, too, it is the choices his characters make which impress us, their decisions to transcend legal--sometimes even moral--expectations: they refuse "to have gotten anything" for themselves. Cooper, of course, often rewards his sensitive characters with material wealth, but they themselves eschew selfish personal satisfaction in order to help others. Thus Marmaduke Temple puts the welfare of Templeton above his personal desire to reward Leatherstocking for saving his daughter's life; Peyton Dunwoodie's loyalty to his country takes precedence over his love for Frances Wharton; Harvey Birch elects a life of poverty rather than accept the money Washington offers him for service to his country; and in Miles Wallingford, Grace Wallingford--like James's Milly Theale of Wings of the Dove--in her dying hours leaves her fortune to Rupert Hardinge, though Rupert's heartless treatment of her has precipitated her death.²

Cooper's use of sensibility as a means of characterization suggests more self-consciousness as an artist than either the general reader or many of his critics ordinarily allow Cooper. All of Cooper's heroes--whether titular or technical--are defined in terms of their adherence to sensibility. The genteel heroes can be

²Milly leaves her fortune to Merton Densher and Kate Croy even though she knows that the couple, aware of Milly's terminal illness, have exploited her affections.

readily measured by their social propriety and their moral refinement. The titular heroes like Natty Bumppo and Harvey Birch are delineated most clearly by their moral imaginations rather than their manners. In the early sea heroes, sensibility is reflected primarily as patriotic feeling; in the late sea heroes as Christian intuition. Throughout Cooper's novels, sensibility functions as a dramatic technique for the portrayal of character.

The examination of Cooper's use of sensibility reveals yet another dimension to his fiction: the character of the man and his country. To trace the concept of sensibility through Cooper's novels is to trace the political, social, and spiritual biography of one of America's staunchest supporters, severest critics, and most conscientious moralists. Cooper's practice in his early novels of locating sensibility in representatives from all social classes attests to his optimistic view of both the American character and American democracy. Just as sensibility in these early novels measures the moral character of a nation, so its restriction in the novels of the late 1830's and early 1840's to members of the upper classes reflects Cooper's growing disenchantment with leveling democracy. In the final sea novels, the expansion of sensibility to encompass Christian intuition represents Cooper's attempt to discover a dimension of the gentleman's character which could in some measure compensate for

America's failures and human nature's shortcomings.
Whatever its manifestations, sensibility serves throughout
Cooper's fiction as an index to his moral vision of the
world.

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