

Americans on Fiction, 1776–1900

1851–1875

Edited by
Peter Rawlings



AMERICANS ON FICTION,
1776–1900

Volume 2

Edited by

Peter Rawlings

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INTRODUCTION: THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL

"The Civil War," as Henry James was one of the first to observe in his book on *Hawthorne* (1879), "marks an era in the history of the American Mind."

It introduced into the national consciousness a certain sense of proportion and relation, of the world being a more complicated place than it had hitherto seemed, the future more treacherous, success more difficult.

There is no doubt that forebodings and anticipations of war, and senses of its consequences during and after the period 1861-1865, inform much of the material in this volume. Since F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941) and before, the mid-nineteenth century has been regarded as the period when American literature came to maturity. It saw the advent and development of Matthiessen's pivotal writers (all male): Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman. Matthiessen's sense of American literary history, however, subordinates or ignores many earlier authors, such as Charles Brockden Brown or Catharine Maria Sedgwick, some of whom figure in the first volume of this edition. It also overlooks the extent to which an atmosphere of war, and the events precipitating it, was crucial to the development of a southern and southwestern literary consciousness.

In "An Inquiry into the Present State of Southern Literature" (No. 13), an anonymous contributor to the *Southern Literary Messenger* returns to the question of American literary independence which had beset writers since 1776. The terms of the polemic have changed, however, as the issue is refracted through a southern lens and related to the institution of slavery. Here, the South, vaunting its peculiarity and distinctiveness (conditions continuously sought in some quarters by American literature at large) contests the literary supremacy of New England and the East in ways analogous to earlier and persisting conflicts between America and England:

There has been no question so often asked, and so variously answered of late years as this, "shall the South have a literature of her own?" It is one of vital importance to her social and political interests, a question on which hangs the integrity of her peculiar institutions, and on which is based the preservation of her social and political independence.

The "object" of the "literature which the South has adopted as her own," it is argued, is "to aim a blow at the existence of the very social fabric which supports it" (98); for this writer, "Massachusetts," five years after Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle*

Tom's Cabin began to make its almost inestimable impact, is the "nursery of poisonous literature" (p. 99).

Similarly, in the same organ, "W. R. A." (No. 16) pleads for the "establishment of a Southern literature, standing secure and independent on its own pedestal," and "lighting up the threshold of its temple with the refulgent beams of its self-illumination" (p. 112). The South recognizes "African Slavery" as "a great social, moral and political blessing," and

as literature has been the most powerful weapon which the enemies of African slavery have used in their attacks, so, also, to literature must we look for the maintenance of our position, and our justification before the world. (p. 113)

"With the great moral force of literature," the "unholy citadel erected by slander, fanaticism, and malignity" can be "overturned"; but the widespread emphasis on Harriet Beecher Stowe and her literary emasculation of the South, makes her and the cultural hegemony of the North the principal targets in an arena that has empowered both the novel and, to an extent, women writers of it:

The success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is an evidence of the manner in which our enemies are employing literature for our overthrow. Is that effusion, in which a woman, instigated by the devil, sows the seed of future strife between the two sections of her country, likely to be the last? No. The literary workshops of the North are even now resounding with the noisy and fanatical labours of those who, with Mrs. Stowe as their model, are forging calumnies, and hammering falsehood into the semblance of truth. Southern men, learn that the arms with which they assail you are the best for your defence. (p. 114)

Such acrimonies were far from confined to the South of course. A contributor to *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, in 1857 (No. 18), devotes a good deal of his energy to impugning the South's potential for producing any kind of literature given its prevailing illiteracy and general cultural barbarism. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is declared "the first proper novel in American literature," and one that "strikes" a "key-note that will not cease" (p. 140).

No limits were imposed on the degree of incontinence deployed at the rhetorical level against Mrs. Stowe. George Frederick Holmes tackles her *Facts for the People* (No. 9) despite professing little "predilection for the disgusting office of castigating such offences here, and rebuking the incendiary publication of a woman" once "an obscure Yankee school-mistress," and now "eaten up with fanaticism, festering with the malignant virus of abolitionism" (p. 66). The gender inflections are intense in southern assaults on Stowe as fears surface about the increasing ability of women to leave the quarantined area of domestic fiction and convert the pen into a sword. "Are scenes of license and impurity," enquires the writer, "and ideas of loathsome depravity and habitual prostitution to be made the cherished topics of the female pen, and the familiar staple of domestic consideration or promiscuous conversation? (p.68). John S. Hart's *Female Prose Writers of America*, which appeared in 1857 (Nos. 19-22)—and where attention is drawn to the "unprecedented success" of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with sales that "exceeded a million copies" in less than nine

months—is evidence not of the arrival of women writers of course, but of their ascendance and re-evaluation (p. 147).

William Dean Howells observed, in his review (No. 31) of John W. De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (one of the few Civil War novels to have much posterity), that:

Our war has not only left us the burden of a tremendous national debt, but has laid upon our literature a charge under which it has hitherto staggered very lamely. Every author who deals in fiction feels it to be his duty to contribute towards the payment of the accumulated interest in the events of the war, by relating his work to them.

“The heroes of young-lady writers in the magazines,” he goes on, “have been everywhere fighting the late campaigns over, again, as young ladies would have fought them” (p. 249), whereas De Forest “is the first to treat the war really and artistically.” Henry James, who also reviewed *Miss Ravenel's Conversion* (No. 32), though less positively, numbered three Civil War stories among his first in the late 1860's and used them, in line with the strategy of Howells's review, to attack what he saw as the feminine proclivities of the genre, and to undermine the writing of women. Neither man—unlike Poe, given his pieces on Catharine Maria Sedgwick and Caroline M. Kirkland, or John S. Hart—would have been out of sympathy with views expressed by Orestes A. Brownson (No. 29), towards the end of the war, in “Literature, Love, and Marriage.” “We have any quantity of fictitious literature,” avers Brownson, “fictitious in all senses of the term, produced chiefly by women, and therefore weak, sentimental, preventing instead of aiding high national culture” (p.220). James's praise for George Eliot's “masculine intellect,” in his review of *Middlemarch* (No. 39), becomes more comprehensible in this context. John Weiss, writing in 1862 (No. 26), had higher expectations for the literary consequences of the war; although in surveying two-thousand years of warfare and its relation to literature, his main project was that of locating the Civil War in a heroic historical paradigm. “War,” he believed should be “the last resort of truly noble and popular ideas,” but once upon a nation, it “quickens the germs of Art, Beauty and Knowledge”: “the pen, thus tempered to a sword, becomes a pen again, but flows with more iron than before” (p. 192).

John W. De Forest own major contribution to nineteenth-century letters was the phrase “great American novel” in an article with that title (No. 36) published in 1868. De Forest's focus is on the question of whether America is now ready to produce such a novel, hitherto “seldom attempted,” a “picture of the ordinary emotions and manners of American existence.” Moving into a mode of retrospective inventory that was to intensify as Americans developed a sense of their fiction's backward reach, De Forest concludes that Washington Irving was “too cautious to make the trial”; Cooper, on the other hand, “devoted himself to Indians, of whom he knew next to nothing, and to backwoodsman and sailors, whom he idealized” (p. 275). “There come to us from the deserts of the past”

names that seem to sound like "Paulding," "Brown," Kennedy"—and we catch nothing further. These are ghosts, and they wrote about ghosts, and the ghosts have vanished utterly.

As for William Gilmore Simms, "another of these shadowy mediums, still living if we are not misinformed," the "best and the worst thing to be said is this—that he is nearly as good as Cooper, and deserves fame nearly as much" (p. 275). An anonymous contributor to the *International Magazine* (No. 2), who regarded Cooper as "both the Horace Vernet and the Claude Lorraine of novelists," would certainly have contested De Forest's relegation of these writers to the realms of the quaint and the rebarbative (p. 2). De Forest continues his campaign, however, with Hawthorne. In a perception that takes us back to views expressed by James Russell Lowell at the end of Volume 1 (pp. xix-xx, 380-394), De Forest writes of Nathaniel Hawthorne that "he staggered under the load of the American novel"; his "romances" are "full of acute spiritual analysis, of the light of other worlds, but also characterized by only a vague consciousness of this life." Hawthorne's romances, like those of his predecessors, are tried at the bar of De Forest's sense of the canons of realism, for which he is an initiating avatar (in theory, rather than in practice):

Such personages as Hawthorne creates belong to the wide realm of art rather than to our nationality. They are probably natives of the furthest mountains of Cathay or of the moon as of the United States of America. They are what Yankees might come to be who should shut themselves up to meditate in old manses.

"They have no sympathy with this eager and laborious people," declares De Forest, which takes so many newspapers,"

builds so many railroads, does the most business on a given capital, wages the biggest war in proportion to its population, believes in the physically impossible and does some of it. Hawthorne's characters cannot talk. Certainly not in the style of this western world; rather in the language of men who never expressed themselves but on paper, and paper in dreams. (p. 276)

After berating Hawthorne for filling his fiction with "New Englanders," and "of the queerest," De Forest offers *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as "the nearest approach to the desired phenomenon" of the "great American novel." Notwithstanding its "faulty plot," where a "black man is painted whiter than the angels," it "was a picture of American life, drawn with a few strong and passionate strokes, not filled in thoroughly, but still a portrait"; but in its successor, *Dred*, Stowe "shrank" once more "into her native shell of New England" (p. 276). De Forest proceeds, in one of the first canons of American fiction, to survey the fiction of James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and others, dismissing them all, in general, as "New England novels" or "localisms." Like many commentators on the causes of what they saw as America's negligible fiction, and with his own comparative failure as a novelist no doubt in mind, De Forest allocates at least some of the blame to the absence of an international copyright agreement, and to the ease with which foreign (mostly English) literature can be imported and sold more cheaply than American. But "so much for the artist," he continues, "now for the sitter":

Ask a portrait-painter if he can make a good likeness of a baby, and he will tell you that the features are not sufficiently marked nor the expression sufficiently personal. Is there not the same difficulty in limning this continental infant of American society, who is changing every year not only in physical attributes, but in the characteristics of the soul? (pp. 279-280)

"Well, what are our immediate chances for a 'great American novel?'" he asks, finally:

We fear that the wonder will not soon be wrought unless more talent can be enlisted in the work, and we are sure that this sufficient talent can hardly be obtained without the encouragement of an international copy right. And, even then, is it time? (p. 280)

At least two writers, Thomas Sergeant Perry (No. 38) and Henry T. Tuckerman (No. 5), have quite different views on American novels and Hawthorne, respectively, from those held by John W. De Forest.

The "outcry for the 'Great American Novel,'" insists Perry, so far from being of any assistance to our fellow-countryman who is trying to win fame by writing fiction," has "rather stood in his way by setting up before him a false aim for his art, and by giving the reader a defective standard by which to judge his art." What matters for Perry is precisely that element of Hawthorne's romances that De Forest thought quaint, irrelevant, and un-American:

There is an American nature, but then there is a human nature underlying it, and to that the novel must be true before anything else. That is what is of importance; it is that alone which makes the novel great, which causes it to be read in all times and in all countries. (p. 291)

What Perry fears, and what he identifies in a range of novels he considers, is "the simple rehearsal of the barrenest external phenomena of life and nature in this country" (pp. 291-292). Taking aim more directly at De Forest, Perry illustrates his point by arguing that "in his writings we find a great deal that is American, but not so much that goes to the making of a really great novel" (p. 293); the "idealizing novelist will be the real novelist," for "all truth does not lie in facts" (p. 300).

Henry T. Tuckerman finds himself able to take Hawthorne more on his own terms than can De Forest, and his elegant and precise account of the salient features of his style, written in the very year of *The Scarlet Letter's* publication (1851), anticipates the approach of much subsequent Hawthorne criticism. Hawthorne's "appeal is to consciousness," he "shadows forth," "hints," "makes signs," and "whispers" (p. 37). Hawthorne, far from confining himself to barren external phenomena, is a "prose-poet" bringing together "scattered beauties." Tuckerman—in an age of dawning realism (the word "realism," in relation to art, is very much an innovation of the 1850's), and as a sign of the greater abstraction of much American critical writing after 1850—makes a significant distinction between "melodramatic" and "meditative" narrative literature:

the former is in a great degree mechanical, and deals chiefly with incidents and adventure; a few types of character, and approved scenic material and what are called effec-

tive situations, make up the story; the other species, on the contrary, is modelled on no external pattern, but seems evolved from the author's mind.

With the latter, "we feel the glow of individual consciousness even in the most technical description." This division, as it mutates into anguished debates about the competing merits of "realism" and "idealism," "realism" and "naturalism," moral and immoral fiction and, for many, the question of whether technically self-conscious writers who produce analytical novels are, by default, pernicious, is to dominate discussion of American fiction henceforth. Within its interstices, "consciousness" (a concept hardly in retreat now in the realms of fiction)—in particular, disputes about the extent to which the novel can, does, or should, be seen as a vehicle for its presentation and registration—is to have an interminable career. Henry James and William Dean Howells, *bêtes noires* to be in the rancorous discussions ahead, are adumbrated in the bifurcation in American writing that Tuckerman begins to make. There is a contrast, he believes, between that "glow, vivacity and rapidity of action," as a function of the "restless temperament and enterprising life of the nation," favoured by American critics at large, and quieter styles that yet "may envelop the rarest energy of thought and depth of insight as well as earnestness of feeling." In a memorable phrase, Tuckerman suggests that proposed in Hawthorne "is not external but moral excitement," and that this is one of his most "felicitous merits" (p. 45). Ten years later, E. P. Whipple's essay on Hawthorne (No. 24), with its carping over "sombre . . . stories lacking in vigor" (p. 161), indicates just how discerning Tuckerman's essay is. It took nearly twenty years for a piece of a similar calibre to appear, Eugene Benson's "Poe and Hawthorne" (No. 35). "Poe and Hawthorne," Benson announces at the outset of his essay, "are two brilliant exceptions in American literature." If greatness lies in the exceptional, however, then the "great American novel" debate had been meaningless from the beginning. The most humorous attack on the exceptional in this volume, and a sign, if one were needed, that novelists neglecting moral imperatives as conventionally conceived are in for trouble, is the review of Melville's *Pierre* (No. 10).

This volume concludes with two essays by George Parsons Lathrop (Nos. 41 & 42), and one by Thomas Sergeant Perry on Ivan Turgenev (No. 43). The approach of Lathrop and Perry to formal aspects of novel construction, and the vocabulary and concepts they employ, have continued, like Tuckerman's, to exercise a powerful grip on contemporary novel criticism, albeit through the conduit of Henry James. For Lathrop, the quality of fiction is no longer separable from its technical elements; and narrowly moral, or didactic, concerns are certainly best left on one side during such evaluations. But in a line that stretches back to Tuckerman, and on to James, the New Critics, Lionel Trilling and beyond, Lathrop's preoccupation is with effective representations of consciousness, a preoccupation involving, in wider senses, immense moral dimensions. For these critics and novelists, the concern with American fiction is parochial in the extreme: what matters is the art and science of novel writing, and whether the novelist or critic is capable of giving an account of her or himself. On the evidence of the essays of Tuckerman, Henry James, Lathrop,

Perry, Howells, and others, however, this, paradoxically, is the terrain of great American fiction and its legacy.

Lathrop, in a position taken up ten years later by James in "The Art of Fiction" (1884), laments the failure of "criticism" to keep "pace with the novel"; missing, in the plethora of magazine scribble on fiction, is the "strong, central light of systematic meditation" (p. 314). The literary history that he goes on to sketch in "Growth of the Novel" situates drama and the theatre at the forefront of the novel's generic antecedents. In this respect, Lathrop can be seen as anticipating a good many of James's mature views on the organizing possibilities of the "centre of consciousness"; indeed, James might well have taken much of the narrative theory for which he is credited, involving a shifting and ambivalent advocating of restricted points-of-view and an attenuation of the narrative voice, directly from Lathrop's essays. The early currency of some of these ideas, however, if not the terms that Lathrop develops and James's subsequent adoptions of them, is evident from James's own assessment of *Middlemarch* (No. 39); his view being that the novel is close to *Romola*, technically, which "sins by excess of analysis; there is too much description and too little drama" (p. 301). Similarly, "philosophical parentheses" and the "interspersed epigram," Lathrop believed, fastened "a clog on the dramatic movement" of stories. The novelist "may fulfill to some extent the functions of a chorus; but he should be very cautious in the fulfilment" (p. 340). Fielding's "garrulous chatting . . . withheld from him the possibility of grouping his keen observations firmly about some centre of steady and assimilative thought" (p. 381). For a "dramatic effect," there had to be a "resolute act of self-renunciation" on the part of the author rather than a visible intervention between "readers and the characters" (p. 319). George Eliot, in *Middlemarch*, tells the reader too much, thus stifling the imagination: "all that can be said about the characters *is* said; but, after all, the result is not so good as if something had been withheld, for our imagination to reach after" (p.320). Pertinent, too, is Perry's assessment of Turgenev's *Rudin* (No. 43)

Then, too, we ought to observe the life-like way in which the novel is written; we are never granted any side views of the hero which are denied the people in the story; we are deceived or put on guard just as they are; we have to study him just as they do; hence it is that a novel barren of incident, and in a way so clumsily put together, succeeds so well in interesting the reader, who finds his curiosity aroused and his sagacity baffled in a way that is not over-common about the heroes of fiction. (p. 357)

Unlike many post-Jamesian critics, problematically attempting to anchor themselves in James's "Prefaces" to the "New York Edition" of his novels and tales (1907-1909), Lathrop was careful in his assessment of the question of narrative intrusion. His assumptions were organicist in that, for instance, he celebrated the "vital and speaking form which we call the novel" (p. 330). But in anticipating Wayne C. Booth and others, he also proposed that the "retiring attitude of the story-mover does not imply total invisibility . . . but only inofficiousness" (p. 381).

It is clear at the end of this volume, then, that whereas some critics by 1875 still held adamantly to the view that the salvation of American fiction would be in the

evolution of a novel form, however distant the prospect, that could map the minutiae of life in the New World in a distinctive idiom, others regarded this as an irrelevance in a world where the coordinates of such questions, like it or not, were being determined by European, even Parisian, preoccupations with the theory and practice of novel composition. Increasingly, however, especially in the approaches of Lathrop and others, the signs were that American interventions in such theories, rather than the Mississippi Valley, or wherever, would be the site of its own identity in transnational realms of fiction.

NOTE ON THE TEXTS

With few exceptions, the texts made available here have been reproduced in their entirety; any excisions are clearly signalled in the end-notes. In the interests of consistent and uncluttered presentation, spelling has occasionally been modernized and the titles of longer texts italicized. Although the content is identical with that of the first publication of each item, no attempt has been made to reproduce the original layout, and any illustrations have been omitted. Footnotes original to each item have been included as footnotes.

Editorial interventions appear in square brackets, and explanatory notes (and a statement about their function) are listed at the end of each volume. The purpose of any head-notes is to supply information about the writer that may be helpful to the non-specialist reader. Such information only appears once; there is an alphabetical list of contributors for all three volumes at the end of Volume 3 to help readers navigate the head-notes. The aim of the introductions is to highlight some of the material, by no means all, and to suggest ways in which it might be thematized and placed in context. The combined index (at the end of Volume 3) contains the names and titles of every person and text cited or discussed.



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THE EVENING BOOK

Anonymous

A review of Caroline M. Kirkland's *The Evening Book; or, Fireside Talk on Morals and Manners, with Sketches of Western Life*. *American Whig Review* (1851).

These sketches and essays of Mrs. Kirkland will add much to a reputation already high. Her style, always rich and sparkling, shines here with remarkable brilliancy. A shrewd observer of characters and manners, this lady has the rare faculty of combining wit and wisdom, and thus, whilst amusing, instructing and refining us. She is, besides, one of the most characteristically national of our writers. Her first work is unrivaled in its delineations of Western life and character. In this she confesses to "an ambition to make a peculiarly American book"; "not that I think American views of manners and morals should be partial or narrow, but because the foreign literature, which furnishes most of the reading of our young people, seems to me likely to inspire them with un-American ideas of society, and even of duty; and it becomes, therefore, especially desirable to refer sometimes to ancient and universal standards—those whose excellence is beyond dispute, though portions of the world have departed from their influence, led away by the incorrect notions of life which prevail in old and corrupt communities."

Mr. Scribner has presented the work in a holiday dress illustrated by beautiful plates from the burin of Burt, on splendid paper, and in elegant type.¹ It will be a great favorite as a present and will, as designed, brighten many a fireside in the coming winter evenings.

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

Anonymous

International Magazine (1851). In its original form, a daguerreotype of James Fenimore Cooper precedes the article.

The readers of the *International* have in the above engraving from a daguerreotype by Brady, the best portrait ever published of an illustrious countryman of ours, who, as a novelist, take him all in all, is entitled to precedence of every other now living. "With what amazing power," exclaims Balzac in the *Revue de Paris*, "has he painted nature! how all his pages glow with creative fire! Who is there writing English among our contemporaries, if not of him, of whom it can be said that he has a genius of the first order?" And the *Edinburgh Review* says, "The empire of the sea has been conceded to him by acclamation"; that, "in the lonely desert or untrodden prairie, among the savage Indians or scarcely less savage settlers, all equally acknowledge his dominion. Within this circle none dares walk but he." And Christopher North, in the *Noctes*: "He writes like a hero."² And beyond the limits of his own country, everywhere, the great critics assign him a place among the foremost of the illustrious authors of the age. In each of the departments of romantic fiction in which he has written, he has had troops of imitators and in not one of them an equal. Writing not from books, but from nature, his descriptions, incidents, and characters, are as fresh as the fields of his triumphs. His Harvey Birch, Leather Stocking, Long Tom Coffin, and other heroes, rise before the mind, each in his clearly defined and peculiar lineaments, as striking original *creations*, as actual persons.³ His infinitely varied descriptions of the oceans, ships gliding like beings of the air upon its surface, vast solitary wilderness, and indeed all his delineations of nature, are instinct with the breath of poetry; he is both the Horace Vernet and the Claude Lorraine of novelists; and through all his works are sentiments of genuine courtesy and honor, and an unobtrusive and therefore more powerful assertion of natural rights and dignity.⁴

William Cooper, the emigrant ancestor of James Fenimore Cooper, arrived in this country in 1679, and settled at Burlington, New Jersey.⁵ He immediately took an active part in public affairs, and his name appears in the list of members of the Colonial Legislature for 1681. In 1687, or subsequent to the establishment of Penn at Philadelphia, he obtained a grant of land opposite the new city, extending several miles along the margin of the Delaware and tributary stream which has since borne the name of Cooper's Creek. The branch of the family to which the novelist belongs removed more than a century since into Pennsylvania, in which state his father was born. He married early, and while a young man established himself at a hamlet in Burlington county, New Jersey, which continues to be known by his name, and afterward in the city of Burlington. Having become possessed of extensive tracts of land on the border of Otsego Lake, in central New York, he began the settlement of his estate there in the autumn of 1785, and in the following spring, erected the first house in Cooperstown. From this time until 1799, Judge Cooper resided alternately at Cooperstown and Burlington, keeping up an establishment at both places. James Fenimore Cooper was born at Burlington on the nineteenth of September, 1789, and in the succeeding year was carried to the new home of his family, of which he is now proprietor.

Judge Cooper being a member of the Congress, which then held its sessions in Philadelphia, his family remained much of the time at Burlington, where our author, when but six years of age, commenced under a private tutor of some eminence his classical education. In 1800 he became an intimate of the family of Rev. Thomas Ellison, Rector of St. Peter's in Albany, who had fitted for the university three of his elder brothers, and on the death of that accomplished teacher was sent to New Haven, where he completed his preparatory studies. He entered Yale College at the beginning of the second term of 1802. Among his classmates were John A. Collier, Judge Cushman, and the late Justice Sutherland of New York, Judge Bissel of Connecticut, Colonel James Gadsden of Florida, and several others who afterwards became eminent in various professions.⁶ John C. Calhoun was at the time a resident graduate, and Judge William Jay of Bedford, who had been his roommate at Albany, entered the class below him.⁷ The late James A. Hillhouse originally entered the same class with Mr. Cooper; there was very little difference in their ages, both having been in the same month and both being much too young to be thrown into the arena of college life.⁸ Hillhouse was judiciously withdrawn for this reason until the succeeding year, leaving Cooper the youngest student at the college; he, however, maintained a respectable position, and in the ancient languages particularly had no superior in his class.

In 1805 he quitted the college, and obtaining a midshipman's warrant, entered the navy. His frank, generous, and daring nature made him a favourite, and admirably fitted him for the service, in which he would unquestionably have obtained the highest honors had he not finally made choice of the ease and quite of the life of a private gentleman. After six years afloat—six years not unprofitably passed, since they gave him that knowledge of maritime affairs which enabled him subsequently,

almost without an effort to place himself at the head of all the writers who in any period have attempted the description of the sea—he resigned his office, and on the first day of January, 1811, was married to Miss De Lancey, a sister of the present Bishop of the Diocese of Western New York, and a descendant of one of the oldest and most influential families in America.

Before removing to Cooperstown he resided a short time in Westchester, New York, and here he commenced his career as an author. His first book was *Precaution*. It was undertaken under circumstances purely accidental, and published under great disadvantages. Its success was moderate, though far from contemptible. It is a ludicrous evidence of the value of critical opinion in this country, that *Precaution* was thought to discover so much knowledge of *English* society, as to raise a question whether its alleged author could have written it. More reputation of this sort of knowledge accrued to Mr. Cooper from *Precaution* than from his subsequent real work on England. It was republished in London, and passed for an English novel.

The Spy followed. No one will dispute the success of *The Spy*. It was almost immediately republished in all parts of Europe. The novelty of an American book of this character probably contributed to its great circulation. It is worthy of remark that all our leading periodicals looked coldly upon it; though the country did not. The *North American Review*—ever unwilling to do justice to Mr. Cooper—had a very ill-natured notice of it, professing to place the *New England Tale* far above it!⁹ In spite of such shallow criticism, however, the book was universally popular. It was decidedly the best American romance then written by an American; not without faults, indeed, but with a fair plot, clearly and strongly drawn characters, and exhibiting great boldness and originality of conception. Its success was perhaps decisive of Mr. Cooper's career, and it gave an extraordinary impulse to literature in the country. More than anything that had before occurred, it roused the people from their feeling of intellectual dependence. The popularity of *The Spy* has been so universal, that there is scarcely a written language into which it is not translated. In 1847 it appeared in *Persian* at Ispahan.

In 1823 appeared *The Pioneers*. This book has passages of masterly description, and is as fresh as a landscape from another world; but it seems to me that it has always had a reputation partly factitious. It is the poorest of the Leather Stocking tales, nor was its success either marked or spontaneous. Still, it was very well received, though it was thought to be a proof that the author was written out. With this book commenced the absurdity of saying Mr. Cooper introduced family traits and family history into his novels. How little of truth there is in this supposition Mr. Cooper has explained in his revised edition, published the present year.

The Pilot succeeded. The success of *The Pilot* was at first a little doubtful in this country; but England gave it a reputation which it still maintains. It is due to Boston to say that its popularity in the United States was first manifested there. I say *due* to Boston, not from considerations of merit in the book, but because for some reason, praise for Mr. Cooper, from New England, has been so rare. The *North America Review* took credit to itself for magnanimity in saying some of his works had

been rendered into French, when they were a part of every literature of Europe. America, it is often said, has no original literature. Where can the model of *The Pilot* be found? I know of nothing which could have suggested it but the following fact, which was related to me in a conversation with Mr. Cooper. *The Pirate* had been published a short time before.¹⁰ Talking with the late Charles Wilkes, of New-York—a man of taste and judgment—our author heard extolled the universal knowledge of Scott, and the sea portions of *The Pirate* cited as a proof. He laughed at the idea, as most seamen would, and the discussion ended by his promising to write a sea story which could be read by landsmen, while seamen should feel its truth. *The Pilot* was the fruit of that conversation. It is one of the most remarkable novels of the time, and everywhere obtained instant and high applause.

Lionel Lincoln followed.¹¹ This was a second attempt to embody history in an American work of fiction. It failed, and perhaps justly; yet it contains one of the nicest delineations of character in Mr. Cooper's works. I know of no instance in which the distinction between a maniac and an idiot is so admirably drawn; the setting was bad, however, and the picture was not examined.

In 1826 came *The Last of the Mohicans*. This book succeeded from the first, and all over Christendom. It has strong parts and weak parts, but it was purely original, and originality always occupies the ground. In this respect it is like *The Pilot*.

After the publication of *The Last of the Mohicans*, Mr. Cooper went to Europe, where his reputation was already well established as one of the greatest writers of romantic fiction which our age, more prolific in men of genius than any other, had produced. The first of his works after he left his native country was *The Prairie*.¹² Its success everywhere was decided and immediate. By the French and English critics it has been deemed the best of his stories of Indian life. It has one leading fault, however, that of introducing any character superior to the family of the squatter. Of this fault Mr. Cooper was himself aware before he finished the work; but as he wrote and printed simultaneously, it was not easy to correct it. In this book, notwithstanding, Natty Bumppo is quite up to his mark, and is surpassed only in *The Pathfinder*. The reputation of *The Prairie*, like that of *The Pioneers*, is in a large degree owing to the opinions of the reviews; it is always a fault in a book that appeals to human sympathies that it fails with the multitude. In what relates to taste, the multitude is of no great authority; but in all that is connected with feeling, they are the highest; and for this simple reason, that as man becomes sophisticated he deviates from nature, the only true source of all our sympathies. Our feelings are doubtless improved by refinement, and vice versa; but their roots are struck in the human heart, and what fails to touch the heart, in these particulars, fails, while that which does touch it, succeeds. The perfection of this sort of writing is that which pleases equally the head and the heart.

The Red Rover followed *The Prairie*. Its success surpassed that of any of its predecessors. It was written and printed in Paris, and all in a few 3 months. Its merits and its reception prove the accuracy of those gentlemen who allege that "Mr.

Cooper never wrote a successful book after he left the United States." It is certainly a stronger work than *The Pilot*, though not without considerable faults.

The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish was the next novel.¹³ The author I believe regards this and *Lionel Lincoln* as the poorest of his works. It met with no great success.

The Water Witch succeeded, but is inferior to any of the other nautical tales. It was the first attempt by Mr. Cooper—the first by any author—to lay the scene of a tale of witchcraft on the coast of America. It has more imagination than many other of Mr. Cooper's works, but the blending of the real with the ideal was in some parts a little incongruous. *The Water Witch* was written in Italy and first printed in Germany.

Of all Americans who ever visited Europe, Mr. Cooper contributed most to our country's good reputation. His high character made him everywhere welcome; there was no circle, however aristocratic or distinguished, in which, if he appeared in it, he was not observed of all observers; and he had the somewhat singular merit of *never forgetting that he was an American*. Halleck, in his admirable poem of "Red Jacket," says well of him:

Cooper, whose name is with his country's woven,
First in her fields, her pioneer of mind,
A wanderer now on other lands, has proven
*His love for the young land he left behind.*¹⁴

After having been in Europe about two years he published his *Notions of the Americans*, in which he "endeavored to repel some of the hostile opinions of the other hemisphere, and to turn the tables on those who at that time most derided and calumniated us." It contained some unimportant errors, from having been written at a distance from necessary documentary materials, but was altogether as just as it was eloquent in vindication of our institutions, manners, and history. It shows how warm was his patriotism; how fondly, while receiving from strangers an homage withheld from him at home, he remembered the scenes of his first trials and triumphs, and how ready he was to sacrifice personal popularity and profit in defence of his country.

He was not only the first to defend and to praise America, but the first to whom appeals were made for information in regard to her by statesmen who felt an interest in our destiny. Following the revolution of the Three Days, in Paris, a fierce controversy took place between the absolutists, the republicans, and the constitutionalists. Among the subjects introduced in the Chambers was the comparative cheapness of our system of government; the absolutists asserting that the people of the United States paid more direct and indirect taxes than the French. La Fayette appealed to Mr. Cooper, who entered the arena, and though, from his peculiar position, at a heavy pecuniary loss, and the danger of incurring yet greater misfortunes, by a masterly *exposé* silenced at once the popular falsehoods.¹⁵ So in all places, circumstances, and times, he was the "American in Europe," as jealous of his country's reputation as his own.

Immediately after, he published *The Bravo*, the success of which was very great: probably equal to that of *The Red Rover*. It is one of the best, if not the very best of the works Mr. Cooper had then written. Although he selected a foreign scene on this occasion, no one of his works is more American in its essential character. It was designed not only to extend the democratical principle abroad, but to confirm his countrymen in the opinion that nations "cannot be governed by an irresponsible minority without involving a train of nearly intolerable abuses." It gave aristocracy some hits, which aristocracy gave back again. The best notice which appeared of it was in the famous Paris gazette entitled *Figaro*, before *Figaro* was brought out by the French government. The change from the biting wit which characterized this periodical to the grave sentiment of such an article, was really touching, and added an indescribable grace to the remarks.

The Heidenmauer followed.¹⁶ It is impossible for me to understand this book who has not some acquaintance with the scenes and habits described. It was not very successful.

The Headsman of Berne did much better.¹⁷ It is inferior to *The Bravo*, though not so clashing to aristocracy. It met with very respectable success. It was the last of Mr. Cooper's novels written in Europe, and for some years the last of a political character.

The first work which Mr. Cooper published after his return to the United States was *A Letter to his Countrymen*. They had yielded him but a hesitating applause until his praise came back from Europe, and when the tone of foreign criticism was changed by acts and opinions of his which should have landed the whole American press for his defence, he was assailed here in articles which either echoed the tone or were actual translations of attacks upon him by foreigners. The custom peculiar to this country of "quoting the opinions of foreign nations by way of helping to make up its own estimate of the degree of merit which belongs to its public men" is treated in this letter with caustic and just severity, and shown to be "destructive of those sentiments of self-respect and of that manliness and independence of thought, that are necessary to render a people great or a nation respectable." The controlling influence of foreign ideas over our literature, fashions, and even politics, are illustrated by the manner in which he was himself treated, and by what he considers the English doctrines which have been broached in the speeches of many of our statesmen. It is a frank and honest book, which was unnecessary as a vindication of Mr. Cooper, but was called for by the existence of the abuse against which it was chiefly directed, though it seems have had little effect upon it. Of the political opinions it contains I have no more to say than that I do not believe in their correctness.

It was followed by *The Monikins*, a political satire, which was a failure.

The next publications of Mr. Cooper were his *Gleanings in Europe. Sketches in Switzerland*, first and second series, each in two volumes, appeared in 1836, and none of his works contain more striking and vivid descriptions of nature, or more agreeable views of characters and manners. It was followed by similar works on France, Italy,

and England. All of these were well received, notwithstanding an independence of tone which is rarely popular, and some absurdities, as, for example, the imputations on the American Federalists in the *Sketches in Switzerland*. The book on England excited most attention and was reviewed in that country with as much asperity as if its own travellers were proverbially not the most shameless libellers that ever abused the hospitality of nations.¹⁸ Altogether the ten volumes which comprise this series may be set down as the most intelligent and philosophical books of travels which have been written by our countrymen.

The American Democrat, or Hints on the Social and Civil Relations of the United States of America, was published in 1835. The design is stated to be, "to make a commencement toward a more just discrimination between truth and prejudice." It is essentially a good book on the virtues and vices of American character.

For a considerable time Mr. Cooper had entertained an intention of writing *The History of the Navy of the United States*, and his early experiences, his studies, his associations, and above all the peculiar felicity of his style when treating of nautical affairs, warranted the expectation that his work would be a solid and brilliant contribution to our historical literature. It appeared in two octavo volumes in 1839, and reached a second edition in 1840, and a third in 1846. The public had no reason to be disappointed; great diligence had been used in the collection of materials; every subject connected with the origin and growth of our national marine had been carefully investigated, and the result was presented in the most attractive and authentic form. Yet a warm controversy soon arose respecting Mr. Cooper's account of the battle of Lake Erie, and in pamphlets, reviews, and newspapers, attempts were made to show that he had done injustice to the American commander in that action. The multitude rarely undertake particular investigations; and the attacks upon Mr. Cooper, conducted with a virulence for which it would be difficult to find any cause in the History, assuming the form of vindications of a brave and popular deceased officer, produced an impression so deep and so general that he was compelled to defend the obnoxious passages, which he did triumphantly in a small volume entitled *The Battle of Lake Erie, or Answers to Messrs. Burgess, Duer, and Mackenize*, published in 1843, and in his notes to the last edition of his *Naval History*. Those who read the whole controversy will perceive that Mr. Cooper was guided by the authorities most entitled to a consideration of an historian, and that in his answers he has demonstrated the correctness of his statements and opinions; and they will perhaps be astonished that he in the first place gave so little cause for dissatisfaction on the part of the friends of Commodore Perry.¹⁹ Besides the *Naval History* and the essays to which it gave rise, Mr. Cooper has published, in two volumes, *The Lives of the American Naval Officers*,* a work of the highest merit in its department, every life being written with conciseness yet fullness, and with great care in regard

* The first and second editions appeared in Philadelphia, and the third in Cooperstown. It was reprinted in 1830 in London, Paris, and Brussels; and an abridgement of it, by the author, has been largely introduced into common schools.

to facts; and in the *Democratic Review* has published an unanswerable reply to the attacks upon the American marine by James and other British historians.²⁰

The first novel published by Mr. Cooper after his return to the United States was *Homeward Bound*.²¹ The two generic characters of the book, however truly they may represent individuals, have no resemblance to classes. There may be Captain Trucks, and there certainly are Steadfast Dodges, but the officers of the American merchant service are in no manner or degree inferior to Europeans of the same pursuits and grade; and with all the abuses of the freedom of the press here, our newspapers are not worse than those of Great Britain in the qualities for which Mr. Cooper arraigns them. The opinions expressed of New-York society in *Home as Found* are identical with those in *Notions of the Americans*, a work almost as much abused for its praise of this country as was *Home as Found* for its censure, and most men of refinement and large observation seem disposed to admit their correctness. This is no doubt the cause of the feeling it excited, for a *nation* never gets in a passion at misrepresentation. It is a miserable country that cannot look down a falsehood, even from a native.

The next novel was *The Pathfinder*. It is a common opinion that this work deserves success more than any Mr. Cooper has written. I have heard Mr. Cooper say that in his own judgment the claim lay between *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer*, but for myself I confess a preference for the sea novels.²² Leather Stocking appears to more advantage in *The Pathfinder* than in any other book, and in *Deerslayer* next. In *The Pathfinder* we have him presented in the character of a lover, and brought in contact with such characters as he associates with in no other stages of his varied history, though they are hardly less favorites with the author. The scene of the novel being the great fresh water seas of the interior, sailors, Indians, and hunters, are so grouped together, that every kind of novel-writing in which he has been most successful is combined in one complete fiction, one striking exhibition of his best powers. Had it been written by some unknown author, probably the country would have hailed him as much superior to Mr. Cooper.

Mercedes of Castile, a Romance of the Days of Columbus, came next. It may be set down as a failure. The necessity of following facts that had become familiar, and which had so lately possessed the novelty of fiction, was too much for any writer.

The Deerslayer was written after *Mercedes* and *The Pathfinder*, and was very successful. Hetty Hunter is perhaps the best female character Mr. Cooper has drawn, though her sister is generally preferred. *The Deerslayer* was the last written of the "Leather Stocking Tales," having come out in 1841, nineteen years after the appearance of *The Pioneers* in 1822. Arranged according to the order of events, *The Deerslayer* should be the first of this remarkable series, followed by *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Pioneers*, and *The Prairie*.

The Two Admirals followed *The Deerslayer*.²³ This book in some respects stands at the head of the nautical tales. Its fault is dealing with too important events to be thrown so deep into fiction; but this is a fault that may be pardoned in a romance. Mr. Cooper has written nothing in description, whether of sea or land, that sur-

passes either of the battle scenes of this work; especially that part of the first where the French ship is captured. *The Two Admirals* appeared at an unfortunate time, but it was nevertheless successful.

Wing-and-Wing, or, Le Feu Follet, was published in 1842.²⁴ The interest depends chiefly upon the manoeuvres by which a French privateer escapes capture by an English frigate. Some of its scenes are among Mr. Cooper's best, but altogether it is inferior to several of his nautical novels.

Wyandotté, or the Huttet Knoll, in its general features resembles *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer*.²⁵ The female characters are admirable, and but for the opinion, believed by some, from its frequent repetition, that Mr. Cooper is incapable of depicting a woman, Maud Meredith would be regarded as among the very first class of such portraitures.

Next came the *Autobiography of a Pocket Handkerchief*, in one volume.²⁶ It is a story of fashionable life in New-York, in some respects peculiar among Mr. Cooper's works, and was decidedly successful. It appeared originally in a monthly magazine, and was the first of his novels printed in this manner.

Ned Myers, in one volume, which followed in the same year, is a genuine biography, though it was commonly regarded as a fiction.²⁷

In the beginning of 1844 Mr. Cooper published *Asbore and Afloat*, and a few months afterward *Miles Wallingford*, a sequel to that tale.²⁸ They have the remarkable minuteness yet boldness of description, and dramatic skill of narration, which render the impressions he produces so deep and lasting. They were as widely read as any of his recent productions.

The extraordinary state of things which for several years has disgraced a part of the state of New-York, where, with unblushing effrontery, the tenants of several large proprietors have refused to pay rents, and claimed, without a shadow of right, to be absolute possessors of the soil, gave just occasion of alarm to the intelligent friends of our institutions; and this alarm increased, when it was observed that the ruffianism of the "anti-renters," as they are styled, was looked upon by many persons of respectable social positions with undisguised approval.²⁹ Mr. Cooper addressed himself to the exposure and correction of the evil, in a series of novels, purporting to be edited from the manuscripts of a family named Littlepage; and in the preface to the first of these, entitled *Satanstoe, a Tale of the Colony*, published in 1845, announces his intention of treating it with the utmost freedom, and declares his opinion, that the "existence of true liberty among us, the perpetuity of our institutions, and the safety of public morals, are all dependent on putting down, wholly, absolutely, and unqualifiedly, the false and dishonest theories and statements that have been advanced in connection with this subject." *Satanstoe* presents a vivid picture of the early condition of colonial New-York. The time is from 1737 to the close of the memorable campaign in which the British were so signally defeated at Ticonderoga. *Chainbearer*, the second of the series, tracing the family history through the Revolution, also appeared in 1845, and the last, *The Red Skins*, a story of the present day, in 1846.³⁰ "This book," says the author, in his preface, "closes

the series of the Littlepage manuscripts, which have been given to the world as containing a fair account of the comparative sacrifices of time, money, and labor, made respectively by the landlord the tenants, on a New-York estate, together with the manner in which usages and opinions are changing among us, and the causes of these changes." These books, in which the most important practical truths are stated, illustrated and enforced, in a manner equally familiar and powerful, were received by the educated and right-minded with a degree of favor that showed the soundness of the common mind beyond the crime-infected districts, and their influence will add to the evidences of the value of the novel as a means of upholding principles in art, literature, morals, and politics.

The Crater, or Vulcan's Peak, followed in 1847. It is a story of the Pacific, embracing some of Mr. Cooper's finest sea pictures, but altogether is not so interesting as the average of his nautical tales.

Oak Openings, or the Bee-Hunter, came next.³¹ It has the merits characteristic of his Indian novels, masterly scene-painting, and decided individuality in the persons introduced.

Jack Tier, or the Florida Reef, appeared in 1848, and is one of the best of the sea stories. The chief character is a woman, deserted by a half smuggler, half buccaneer, whom she joins in the disguise of a sailor, and accompanies undiscovered during a cruise. In vividness of painting and dramatic interest it has rank with the *Red Rover* and *The Pilot*.

The Sea Lions, or the Lost Sealers, was published in 1849. It deals to some extent in metaphysics, and its characters are for the most part of humble conditions. It has more of domestic life than any of the other nautical pieces.

In the spring of 1850 came out *The Ways of the Hour*, the last of this long series of more than thirty novels, and like the Littlepage MSS, it was devoted to the illustration of social and political evils, having for its main subject the constitution and office of juries.³² In other works Mr. Cooper appears as a conservative; in this as a destructive. The book is ingenious and able, but has not been very successful.

In 1850 Mr. Cooper came out for the first time as a dramatic writer, in a comedy performed at Burton's theatre in New-York.³³ A want of practice in writing for the stage prevented a perfect adaptation of his piece for this purpose, but it was conceded to be remarkable for wit and satirical humor. He has now in press a work illustrative of the social history and condition of New-York, which will be published during the summer by Mr. Putnam, who from time to time is giving to the public the previous works of Mr. Cooper, with his final revisions, and such notes and introductions as are necessary for the new generation of readers.³⁴ The *Leather Stocking Tales*, constituting one of the great works to be ranked hereafter with the chief masterpieces of prose fiction in the literature of the world, are among the volumes now printed.

It cannot be denied that Mr. Cooper is personally unpopular, and the fact is suggestive of one of the chief evils in our social condition. In a previous number of this magazine we have asserted the ability and eminently honorable character of a

large class of American journals. The spirit of another class, also in many instances conducted with ability, is altogether bad and base; jealous, detracting, suspicious, "delighting to deprave";³⁵ betraying a familiarity with low standards in mind and morals, and a consciousness habituated to interested views and sordid motives; degrading every thing that wears the appearance of greatness, sometimes by plain denial and insolent contempt, and sometimes by wretched innuendo and mingled lie and sophistry; effectually dissipating all the romance of character, and all the enthusiasm of life; hating dignity having no sympathies with goodness, insensible to the very existence of honor as a spring of human conduct; treating patriotism and disinterestedness with an elaborate sneer, and receiving the suggestions of duty with a horselaugh. There is a difference not easily to be mistaken between the lessening of men which is occasioned by the loftiness of the platform whence the observation is made, and that which is produced by the malignant envy of the observer; between the gloomy judicial ferocity of a Pope or a Tacitus, and the villain levity which revels in the contemplation of imputed faults, or that fiendishness of feeling which gloats and howls over the ruins of reputations which itself has stabbed.³⁶

For a few years after Mr. Cooper's return from Europe, he was repeatedly urged by his friends to put a stop to the libels of newspapers by an appeal to the law; but he declined. He perhaps supposed that the common sense of the people would sooner or later discover and right the wrong that was done to him by those who, without the slightest justification, invaded the sacredest privacies of his life for subjects of public observation. He finally decided, at the end of five years after his return, to appeal to the tribunals, in every case in which anything not by himself submitted to public criticism, in his works, should be offensively treated, within the limits of the state of New-York. Some twenty suits were brought by him, and his course was amply vindicated by unanimous verdicts in his behalf. But the very conduct to which the press had compelled him was made cause of ungenerous prejudices. He has never objected to the widest latitude or extremest severity in criticisms of his writings, but simply contended that the author should be let alone. With him, individually, the public had nothing to do. In the case of a public officer, slanders may be lived down, but a literary man, in his retirement, has no such means of vindication; his only appeal is to the laws, and if they afford no protection in such cases, the name of law is contemptible.

I enter here upon no discussion of the character of the late Commander Slidell Mackenzie, but observe simply that no one can read Mr. Cooper's volume upon the battle of Lake Erie and retain a very profound respect for that person's sagacity or sincerity. The proprietors of the copyright of Mr. Cooper's abridged *Naval History* offered it, without his knowledge, to John C. Spencer, then Secretary of the State of New-York, for the school libraries of which that officer had the selection.³⁷ Mr. Spencer replied with peculiar brevity that he would have nothing to do with such a partisan performance, but soon after directed the purchase of Commander Mackenzie's *Life of Commodore Perry*,³⁸ which was entirely and avowedly partisan, while Mr. Cooper's book was rigidly impartial. Commander Mackenzie returned the

favor by hanging the Secretary's son.³⁹ A circumstance connected with this event illustrates what we have said of obtaining justice from the newspapers. A month before Commander Mackenzie's return to New-York in the *Somers*, Mr. Cooper sent to me, for publication in a magazine of which I was editor, an examination of certain statements in the *Life of Perry*; but after it was in type, hearing of the terrible mistake which Mackenzie had made, he chose to suffer a continuation of injustice rather than strike a fallen enemy, and so directed the suppression of his criticism. Nevertheless, as the statements in the *Life of Perry* very materially affected his own reputation, in the following year, when the natural excitement against Mackenzie had nearly subsided, he gave his answer to the press, and was immediately accused in a "leading journal of the country" of having in its preparation devoted himself, from the date of that person's misfortune, to his injury. The reader supposes, of course, that the slander was contradicted as generally as it had been circulated, and that justice was done to the forbearance and delicacy with which Mr. Cooper had acted in the matter; but to this day, neither the journal in which he was assailed, nor one in a hundred of those which repeated the falsehood, has stated these facts. Here is another instance: The late William L. Stone agreed with Mr. Cooper to submit a certain matter of libel for amicable arbitration, agreeing, in the event of a decision against him, to pay Mr. Cooper two hundred dollars toward the expenses he must incur in attending to it.⁴⁰ The affair attracted much attention. Before an ordinary court Mr. Cooper should have received ten thousand dollars; but he accepted the verdict agreed upon, the referees deciding without hesitation that he had been grossly wronged by the publication of which he had complained. After the death of Mr. Stone one of the principal papers of the city stated that his widow was poor, and had appealed to Mr. Cooper's generosity for the remission of a fine, which could be of no importance to a gentleman of his liberal fortune, but had been answered with a rude refusal. The statement was entirely and in all respects false, and it was indignantly contradicted upon the authority of President Wayland, the brother of Mrs. Stone; but the editors who gave it currency have never retracted it, and it yet swells the tide of miserable defamation which makes up the bad reputations of so many of the purest of men.⁴¹ Numerous other instances might be quoted to show not only the injustice with which Mr. Cooper has been treated, but the addiction of the press to libel, and its unwillingness to atone for wrongs it has itself inflicted.

It used to be the custom of the *North American Review* to speak of Mr. Cooper's works as "translated into French," as if thus giving the highest existing evidence of their popularity, while there was not a language in Europe into which they did not all, after the publication of *The Red Rover*, appear almost as soon as they were printed in London. He has been the chosen companion of the prince and the peasant, on the borders of the Volga, the Danube, and the Guadalquivir; by the Indus and the Ganges, the Paraguay and the Amazon; where the name even of Washington was never spoken, and our country is known only as the borne of Cooper. The world has living no other writer whose fame is so universal.

Mr. Cooper has the faculty of giving to his pictures an astonishing reality. They are not mere transcripts of nature, though as such they would possess extraordinary merit, but actual creations, embodying the very spirit of intelligent and genial experience and observation. His Indians, notwithstanding all that has been written to the contrary, are no more inferior in fidelity than they are in poetical interest to those of his most successful imitators or rivals. His hunters and trappers have the same vividness and freshness, and in the whole realm of fiction there is nothing more actual, harmonious, and sustained. They evince not only the first order of inventive power, but a profoundly philosophical study of the influences of situation upon human character. He treads the deck with the conscious pride of home and dominion: the aspects of the sea and sky, the terrors of the tornado, the excitement of the chase, the tumult of battle, fire, and wreck, are presented by him with a freedom and breadth of outline, a glow and strength of coloring and contrast, and a distinctness and truth of general and particular conception, that place him far in advance of all the other artists who have attempted with pen or pencil to paint the ocean. The same vigorous originality is stamped upon his nautical characters. The sailors of Smollett are as different in every respect as those of Eugène Sue and Marryat are inferior.⁴² He goes on board his ship with his own creations, disdaining all society and assistance but that with which he is thus surrounded. Long Tom Coffin, Tom Tiller, Trysail, Bob Yarn, the boisterous Nightingale, the mutinous Nighthead, the fierce but honest Boltrope, and others who crowd upon our memories, as familiar as if we had ourselves been afloat with them, attest the triumph of this self-reliance. Amid when, as if to rebuke the charge of envy that he owed his successes to the novelty of his scenes and persons, he entered upon fields which for centuries had been illustrated by the first geniuses of Europe, his abounding power and inspiration were vindicated by that series of political novels ending with *The Bravo*, which have the same supremacy in their class that is held by *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover* among stories of the sea. It has been urged that his leading characters are essentially alike, having no difference but that which results from situation. But this opinion will not bear investigation. It evidently arose from the habit of clothing his heroes alike with an intense individuality, which under all circumstances sustains the sympathy they at first awaken, without the aid of those accessories to which artists of less power are compelled to resort. Very few authors have added more than one original and striking character to the world of imagination; none has added more than Cooper; and his are all as distinct and actual as the personages that stalk before us on the stage of history.

To be American, without falling into Americanism, is the true task that is set before the native artist in literature, the accomplishment of which awaits the reward of the best approval in these times, and the promise of an enduring name. Some of our authors, fascinated very excusably with the faultless models of another age, have declined this condition, and have given us Spectators and Tattlers with false dates, and developed a style of composition of which the very merits imply an anachronism in the proportion of excellence.⁴³ Others have understood the result

to be attained better than the means of arriving at it. They have not considered the difference between those peculiarities in our society, manners, tempers, and tastes, which are genuine and characteristic, and those which are merely defects and errors upon the English system; they have acquired the force and gayety of liberty, but not the dignity of independence, and are only provincial, when they hoped to be national. Mr. Cooper has been more happy than any other writer in reconciling these repugnant qualities, and displaying the features, character, and tone of a great rational style in letters, which, original and unimitative, is yet in harmony with the ancient models.

THE MORAL AND ARTISTIC IN PROSE FICTION

Anonymous

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The popular novel of modern times is perhaps too well known to need a definition. Still it may be proper, in reference to the acquisition of just standards, to throw out some general considerations in regard to this peculiar structure in art. The history of the novel is a very simple one. In general respects it is that of the drama; one of the happy modes by which ingenuity contrives to beguile ignorance to knowledge. Its beginnings are to be found amongst the first dawnings of the human intellect. The child himself is a *raconteur*.⁴⁴ He begins the exercise of his thought by taking his constructive faculty for its assistance, in the ambitious desire to provoke the wonder and admiration of his young and less endowed companions. He invents facts and situations, and accumulates events in proper order and becoming relation, so as to form a history. And in this exercise he becomes an artist. The continuance of the practice results in a greater or smaller degree of perfection, more or less modified by the surrounding influences of society and proper models.

Even in childhood, however, the faculty is an extraordinary one. It betrays talents which are by no means shared by many. Not one child in the hundred possesses the endowment, or certainly to no great extent. They may possess large faculties of thought and of expression. They may give forth elaborate sentiments and show proofs of ingenious speculation, accompanied by eloquent utterance. They may be poets even, without possessing the faculty of weaving together, in intricate relation and with due dependency, such scenes and events in life, indicated by the interposition of moral agents, as distinguish the labors of the composer in prose fiction. For this they strive vainly; and many strive, who, highly endowed in seemingly kindred departments of art, yet fail utterly to take the first step in the constructing of prose fiction.

Not so with him who is "to the manner born."⁴⁵ To him, employing the language of Hamlet, it comes "easy as lying."⁴⁶ Were older heads to give their attention to the boy narratives that spell the ears of the happy groups that linger by the school-house porch, or in the play-grounds, or on a Saturday out among the woods, they would be surprised to discover, amidst so much of the frivolous and puerile, so much that betrayed thought and talent in invention,—the invention or the capacity for structure invariably preceding the moral in the mind of the boy, and even the thought by which what is simply moral in the story is educed or indicated; the boldness of the fancy and the readiness of resource in the *raconteur*, still showing themselves superior to the general crudeness of the conception, and the feeble and common-place character of the materials. We are made to see the scheme in spite of the agency; made to observe a fitness of parts and a symmetrical design, leading through a thousand awkwardnesses and, obscurities to a really judicious moral. Of course the moral as such forms no part of the object of the juvenile narrator, or his more juvenile audience. The common aim is the story—the simple accumulation of interesting incidents in relation to some hero for whom all sympathies are enlisted. But as truthfulness is never wanting in its moral, and as the great end of every artist is the approximation of all his fiction to a seeming truth, so unavoidably he inculcates a moral, of more or less value, whenever he tells a story. As the peculiar endowment which makes the *raconteur* is equally native and decided, so the passion for his narratives, even among those who do not share his faculties, is equally true to the moral instincts of his auditory. All listen with eagerness, and yield ready credence to all statements which keep within the verge of possibility; and with the eager and believing mind of youth, the limits of the possible are wonderfully flexible, and oppose no unnecessary barriers to the ardent spirit and the free imagination.

It is this ready faith in the auditory which determines the legitimacy of the art—which has been practised from the beginning of time, in all the nations and all the ages of the earth. No people have ever lived without their authors of fictitious narrative. No people can live without them, since the faculties which find their utterance through this medium are the very faculties—the creative, the combining, and the endowing—by which men are distinguished from all other animals. The art has shown itself quite as decidedly among the savages of North America, as among the most highly refined of the Asiatic nations. The inventions of our Six Nations, of the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Catawbas, if inferior in polish and variety, do not seem to have been less daring and original than those of the Arabians, to whom we are indebted for some of the most admirable of those legends which seem particularly designed to do their offices of tuition with a young and primitive people.⁴⁷ These fictions, constituting some of the very loveliest conceptions which art has ever drawn from the fountains of the imagination, were at first simple, and like those of childhood. The additions of succeeding generations, the more elaborate efforts of superior artists, have improved them for the delight of races more matured. At first these performances were scenes and sketches rather than histories, and were employed upon such events of the common experience as were at once most natural

and impressive. But when religion began to act upon the imagination, the artist soon became tasked for higher exercises, and glimpses of the wild and spiritual were made to elevate the common-place and ordinary. This led to the machinery of superstition. Hence magic, as an agency by which romance was first begotten; hence *diablerie*,⁴⁸ by which the soul was made to startle at contact with a spiritual world, even when the doctrine of a future itself was left totally untaught, except as a purely speculative philosophy. In the phantoms of the imagination, the spectres of ignorant dread, and those vague and shadowy aspects that lurked in lonely places, among the woods, in the hollows of desolate hills, in the depths of lovely but forbidden waters, the various orders and denominations of Gnome, Kobold, Ondine, Sylph and Fairy, we behold the fantastic creations of a genius struggling constantly to pass from the oppressive chambers of the real, into the rare atmosphere of an ideal which suffered from no incumbrances.⁴⁹

Gradually, as art continued to advance in the refinement of her own powers, and in the more facile employment of her own machinery, fiction became a thing of more complexity of form and of diminished imagination in respect to its conceptions. As the faith of the ignorant in the objects of former superstition became lessened and inflexible, the *raconteur* found it necessary to accommodate his fiction to the more rigid and exacting standards of the popular belief. To seem like truth was still, as it had always been in all ages, the object of the judicious artist; and the invention which had hitherto been exercised with the vague and supernatural, suffered no real or great diminution of its resources, when it felt itself compelled to turn its eye without rather than within for its materials; when the deeds of man, rather than his secret soul and speculative performances, afforded the substance of the chronicle; and the collective heart of the multitude, in its open exhibitions, served for the field of analysis, in place of the single individual, being, doing, or suffering, which hitherto had been the almost exclusive study. Histories of men—periods which betrayed large groups in active issues, such as the middle ages—naturally took the place of more primitive material. The romance of progress was the legitimate successor of that which illustrated the purely spiritual nature—which, by the way, was a romance of progress also, though in a sense very different from any other; and this, in turn, was followed just as naturally by the romance of society, or the ordinary novel of the present day.

In each of the latter classes of fiction, the chief object seems to have been so to delineate the aspects of real life, under certain conditions of society, as at once to preserve all their distinctive characteristics, and to invest with a biographical interest certain favorite studies of character and situation. These objects render necessary an admirable co-operation of the artist with the philosopher; the painter of detail with the poet of fine conceptions. It must be evident, even to persons of the most ordinary reflection and understanding, that to execute such a design with only moderate success, demands a very rare combination of moral attributes. Scarcely any intellectual performance, indeed, could task a greater variety of human powers. Keen perception, quick instincts, delicate tastes, strong good sense, a perfect knowledge of

character, a nice appreciation of all that constitutes the sensibilities, and all that makes the virtues of the social man;—these are all absolute requisites for that artist, who, in the delineation of real life, in an atmosphere of fiction, must, to a certain extent, borrow faculties from every other department of human art. The poet must yield him fancy and imagination; the painter, an eye to the landscape; the sculptor, a just conception of form and attitude; the dramatist, combination and the art of trouping;—and even the lawyer and the historian must, or may be drawn upon,—the one for the capacity to argue out a case from certain premises and facts to a just conclusion,—to weigh the motives to action, and determine the awards of judgment; and the other, to sift the causes of social progress,—to estimate duly the morals of leading events, the effects which they should produce, and the principles to which, whether for good or evil, they are likely to give birth hereafter, affecting equally the condition of the community and the aspirations of the individual man. In a rare judgment all these faculties are necessarily found to unite. The artist in prose fiction, more than any other, must possess in large degree the constructive faculty. Poetry depends chiefly upon its courage and sentiment; the drama upon its passion; music upon its spirituality; and painting upon its happy distribution of light and shade, the harmony of its colors, and the symmetry of its forms. But, borrowing in some degree all these agencies, the artist in prose fiction makes them all ancillary to one particularly his own, and that we consider the constructive faculty. With this faculty it is that he frames and adapts his materials to whatever sort of edifice it is the particular aim of his genius to erect. That edifice may be a palace or a hovel, but it is required to be symmetrical, in compliance with laws growing out of the very conception which suggests the structure. The builder, to achieve the reputation of a master, must conceive boldly the plan and purpose of his fabric; and this requires a vigorous imagination. He must possess a lively fancy, else how should he adorn fitly and properly embellish the fabric which he has raised? He must be a person of great vigilance and freshness of resource, else how should he vary his entertainments for his guests according to their differing characteristics and desires? The flexibility of his intellectual vision must be great, else how should he be capable of that instinctive appreciation of character which is called for by the constant necessity of discriminating his *dramatis personae*, the great essential requisite for success in portraiture and for dramatic vitality in action? The first dawning of the humors of a period,—using the word in the sense of Ben Jonson,—its passing moods and fashions, its singular traits of moral and society, (which are mostly epidemical, and flit with the progress of a season), are among the minor but scarcely less necessary requisitions of his art; to execute which requires a rare versatility of talent. To this versatility no mere summary, like the present, could possibly do justice. Let it suffice that the great or successful worker in prose fiction must be, taking Walter Scott for our most obvious example, a person of equal imagination and cool common sense; of lively but healthy sensibilities; of great tact, (which is another word for admirable taste), and of equal vigilance and courage. He must be able to observe without effort,—so endowed by nature and so trained by practice as to achieve, so

to speak, by the simple outpouring of his customary thoughts. His habitual mental exercise must be the acquisition of material, and its partial subjection to his purposes, though in detached and fragmentary conditions, susceptible of adaptation to more elaborate uses when his schemes ripen into design. Carrying the materials which he thus habitually realizes, without effort and almost without consciousness, to the alembic of his thought, he will extract from them by a process which, in the trained author, goes on without respite, all the sublimated essences which, thus resolved, become aggregated within himself and constitute the means and expedients of his own genius. He is original and inventive in due degree as he has incorporated these external elements in with his own thoughts, and the habitual workings of his own intellect.

To acquire such materials, and to attain these results, no mere fagging with a purpose can possibly avail. No mere drudgery under the stimulating force of will can possibly yield the habitual condition by which such accumulations go on, with all the regularity of advancing and returning hours. Cramming is no more likely to produce digestion in the case of the intellectual, than in that of the animal condition. On the contrary, as in the latter, the effect is unfavorable to the proper incorporation of the food with the healthy flesh and blood, and true nature of the recipient. And without the harmonious cooperation of the several powers and attributes,—unless the aliment taken in by the senses of the student and the inventor be kindred in quantity and quality with that upon which his genius may be supposed to feed, the latter is enfeebled rather than sustained by the innutritious supply, and the fruits of his labor lack equally congruity and health. If, as Milton hath it, the life of him who would write a poem must itself be a poem, so must the habitual tendency of observation and thought of him who deals in prose fiction, tend to the supply of means favorable in particular to his freshness, his invention, and his just appreciation of all the varieties of human character. Perhaps we may say all this, when we adopt the peculiar idiom of another nation, and say that for his art there must be a nature.

It is very clear that, of the thousand fine issues which belong to every action in the progress of a story, the trials of the heart, the displays of passion, the subtle combinations of wit, the logical results of judgment, the fancy which happily relieves the action in the proper place, the vivacity which keeps the interest astir, the invention which provides the impressive incident, and all the various and numerous faculties, of feeling and understanding, which need to have fulness and free play in the development and action of a scheme which embodies equally and all the characteristics by which society is moved and human sensibility excited; it must be very clear, we say, that there can be very few of these agencies, about which, as the necessity for their employment arises, the author could deliberately sit down to reason. It would be morally and physically impossible, were any such necessity to exist, that his labors should ever arrive at the honors of a single volume. On the contrary, his resources should be so equally ready and ample, that he shall be conscious, his progress once begun, of no let or hindrance, calling for long pause or hesitation in

the prosecution of his scheme. There must be no need to stop, and study, and adjust, before he can conscientiously set down. His implements must all be at hand, and at his instant control. His mental constitution must be that of the poet. He must be born to his task. You cannot fashion him to it by any course of training. He works quite as much by intuition as by calculation and common reasoning. His plan once fairly conceived, his thoughts and fancies, to use the felicitous language of Milton, must, "like so many nimble and airy servitors, trip about him at command, and, in well-ordered files as he would wish, fall aptly in their own places."⁵⁰ He leaps to his conclusions as if upon a wing of equal certainty and fleetness; and the chief and difficult study before him is at the beginning, when reason demands that he should choose his ground and field of operations, with such a careful regard to his peculiar tastes, studies and experiences, as shall give free play to whatever is individual in his character and genius. Great freedom of speech, affording a ready flow in the narrative, a prompt fancy to meet emergencies and supply details, so that the action shall at no time falter or become flat; a quick and keen perception of the differing shades and degrees, in quality, of human character; a nice appreciation of the delicate and noble, the lofty and the low, the sublime and the ridiculous; an eye eager to seek and prompt to discern the picturesque; a facility in finding varieties and in the suggestion of lively contrasts; and that flexibility of mood, by which one, having a ready utterance, may individualize the several dialects of the *dramatis personae*—dialects which as completely distinguish the individual from his companions, as do the particular traits of his countenance, the sound of his voice and movement of his body; these are all, in greater or less degree, essential to the successful pursuit of his art by the novelist and writer of prose fiction. If held generally, and in large endowment, and exercised with corresponding industry, these faculties must render him an artist of the highest order,—remarkable, as the Germans have it, for the great faculty of Shakespeare, his many-sidedness, or catholicity,—a poet, a philosopher and dramatist, a painter, a seer, and a prophet! His words will flow from him like those of inspiration. His creations, from their equal majesty, grace and beauty, will seem worthy to have owned a divine original. His voice will swell, in due season, to a natural authority in every ear, and his works will gradually pass into the common heart, lifting it to an habitual appreciation of the high humanities which it is the becoming object of a genius so worthily endowed to teach.

The fabric of such an artist will be raised with an equal eye to its uses, its durability, and grandeur. It will be no mere pleasure-house. Its objects are never temporary. The true genius works not less for eternity than man. It is, indeed, in working for eternity that he works for man. He has but a slender appreciation of the importance of his race, who only sees them as they exist around him; who, satisfied with the present sounds that fill his ears, entertains no hungering thirst for that faint voice, sounding ever in the solitude, which comes slowly but surely up from the far-off abodes of his posterity. He, on the contrary, who properly esteems his vocation, feels indeed that successful working must always imply the future only. To be of and with the present only, to speak the voice with which it is already familiar, to go