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SOCIAL PROGRESS AND IDEOLOGY IN COOPER'S LITTLEPAGE TRILOGY

By

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL PROGRESS AND IDEOLOGY IN COOPER'S LITTLEPAGE TRILOGY

BY

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The purpose of this study is to inquire into some of the fundamental ideological beliefs James Fenimore Cooper demonstrated in his writings in response to the political and economic progress in Jacksonian America. Analyses of Satanstoe, The Chainbearer and The Redskins, the three Littlepage novels Cooper wrote during the years of 1845 and 1846 to defend New York's landed gentry in the Anti-Rent controversy, are intended to exhibit the important elements of Cooper's ideology and the activities of his interior life within the historical context of intense national debate on the meaning and direction of American democracy. As a historian and novelist, Cooper addressed the immediate ideological and social issues of his time; therefore the literary significance of his work, this study argues, should be assessed on the basis of a general approach to the decisive political and economic conditions of the society in which he lived.

This study consists of seven chapters. The introductory

chapter briefly reviews the dominating trends of Cooper's criticism in connection with the topics and the novels examined. The first two chapters provide a biographical, social, and political context for the discussion of Cooper's political principle and offer an explanation of how and why he chose to write the Littlepage trilogy despite the obvious risk they represented to his status as an America's first popular novelist. The next three chapters are devoted to the discussion of the actual texts of the Littlepage novels and examine, respectively, Cooper's argumentation for the gentry's rights of land ownership, his historiography and social types, and social progress and audience. The discussions herein attempt to illustrate certain issues that deeply concerned Cooper such as the necessity of property rights, the validity of the political and economic position of the landed aristocracy in a hierarchical society, and the decay of public mind that eroded the "common sense" of American democracy. The final chapter uses The Crater as a summary of the themes discussed in the earlier chapters and examines Cooper's view of America's social and economic progress in connection with his turning to religious solace.

To My Parents

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INTRODUCTION

A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Pre-Civil War American fiction, many critics assert, articulates a romance which revolves around America's own archetype and myth, and therefore has little to do with the political or economic conditions of the society in which it was produced. In this context, James Fenimore Cooper is often regarded as an America's greatest romancer who, through the archetypal hero of Natty Bumppo, defines and explains certain "mythic" aspects of the American experience.[1] The questions that arise here are: What are these "mythic" aspects of American experience that Cooper was trying to convey to his audience? And more specifically, what was his role as man of letters in the turmoil of the

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[1]Joel Porte sees that the frequent unreality of Cooper's vision of America seen in the Leatherstocking Tales may be accounted for what D. H. Lawrence calls "a kind of yearning myth" of the New World. Lawrence and Cooper, Porte points out, "shared the same feeling about the American continent-- a feeling for its terrifying grandeur and cruel power(its nature and race)." In Cooper's version of the archetypal American fable, Porte says, "the young hero's introduction to the wilderness is an initiation into life," whereas "Poe's version equates the exploration of the wilderness with the stalking of the darkest aspects of the self and suggests how fatal the American experience may ultimately prove to be." The Romance in America (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 3, 85.

new or still evolving socio-economic orders of Jacksonian America?

Literature may be most broadly considered as an extant and vital part of man's culture, of his equipment for viewing the world and his place in it. Its immediate function as a facet of culture, as some Marxist critics contend, is mainly of "a socially symbolic act," which addresses issues regarding history, politics, social and economic change and deals with tensions of political ideologies or class consciousness among different social groups in a given historical period.[2] In stressing the importance of the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts, Fredric Jameson argues that the political perspective is "not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today-- the psychoanalytic or the mythcritical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural-- but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation."[3]

Therefore, literature, according to Marxist critics, is an imaginative form of political ideologies or class consciousness, expressing itself by means of verbal images. As a cultural artifact, Jameson points out, it "fulfills a specific ideological mission, in legitimating a given power

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[2]See the first chapter of Fredric Jameson's The Political Unconscious (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 17-102.

[3]Ibid., 17.

structure, in perpetuating and reproducing the latter, and in generating specific forms of false consciousness." Its ideological commitment, Jameson sees, "is not first and foremost a matter of moral choice but of the taking of sides in a struggle between embattled groups."[4]

As a historian and novelist, Cooper addressed "the decisive ideological and political problems" of his time.[5] What he wrote in his historical novel-- whether it is "set at the landing of white America" of the Leatherstocking Tales or placed in the reality of the political and economic change of the Littlepage trilogy-- unquestionably expresses his own attitude to America's ideological or political issues. In this study I shall inquire into some of the ideological assumptions Cooper implicitly but acutely demonstrated in his writings; then I will analyze the thematic and structural tensions and ambiguities as seen in his Littlepage trilogy within the historical context of intense national debate on the meaning and direction of American democracy; and finally I will discuss the

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[4]Ibid., 290-291.

[5]Georg Lukacs, The Historical Novel, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). Lukacs argues that the artistic form of historical novel is a "reflection of the important features of objective reality" of popular life. Historical novelists express their ideological feelings in response to "the uneven and crisis-filled development of popular life." So their work should be interpreted "on the basis of a general approach to the decisive ideological and political problems." 332-333.

significance of his role as a social critic as opposed to that of an artist.

In this introductory chapter, I will briefly review the dominating trends of Cooper criticism in connection with the topics and the novels I will be discussing in this study. Then I devote the first chapter to the biographical facts of Cooper's life, which I believe are decisive in shaping the novelist's political mind and social values. In the second chapter I set out the main aspects of political belief and economic conditions in the Jacksonian age and thereby offer an explanation of how and why Cooper chose to write the Littlepage Manusripts despite the obvious risk they represented to his status as an America's first popular novelist. In the third and fourth chapters, I will look into the actual texts of the Littlepage trilogy to examine, respectively, the author's presentation of the gentry's rights of land ownership and his historiography and social types. Finally, I will analyze Cooper's view of America's social and economic progress in connection with his turning to religious solace. Throughout the entire study, I am guided by the belief that literature is closely related to the political and economic conditions of the society in which it was produced. Accordingly, a text's literary significance has to be assessed in conjunction with its articulation of the political and economic factors and contraditions of the given historical moment.

The history of Cooper's literary reputation has certainly been one of the most curious, erratic and controversial in American literature. Yet one thing on which many critics agree is that in many respects Cooper stands at the beginning of American fiction. James Wallace describes Cooper's contribution to American literature as follows:

> Despite earlier novels by Charles Brocken Brown, Royall Tyler, John Neal, and a host of others, there simply was no audience whose taste could respond to an indigenous American fiction when Cooper began to write. The fiction that Americans read was entirely imported: the epistolary novels of Richardson and his epigones at the Minerva Press; the moral fictions of Hannah More and Amelia Opie; the provincial romances of Edgeworth and Scott; Byron's Oriental tales. Brown is only the most famous of those original creative talents whose ambition to become great novelists (or at least to support themselves by their writing) foundered on the indifference of the reading public. Yet in a surprisingly short time, Cooper succeeded in transforming both his art and his audience from awkward imitations of the English into something triumphantly American; in the process, he created the audience which represented the reading public for every American author through most of the nineteenth century, the audience to which Hawthorne, Melville, Stowe, and Twain tried (at least intermittently) to appeal and which determined the commercial success or failure of every American novel. How did he do it?[6]

As one of the first successful American novelists, Cooper is often cited as a major contributor to a series of important innovations in American literature. Before Hawthorne, he created historical romances, including one set in Puritan New England; before Melville, he introduced sea-

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[6]James D. Wallace, Early Cooper and His Audience (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), vii.

going fiction in which life on board a ship was symbolic as well as realistic; before James, he wrote international novels. Each of these subsequent writers of the American Renaissance had read Cooper. According to Wallace, "Cooper's influence endured for several decades, and most aspiring American novelists assumed that they were writing for Cooper's audience."[7] At any rate, Cooper, a pathfinder into the possibilities of fiction in the new world, surely supplied them with one thing which he himself had unfortunately lacked: an example, for better or worse, of what the novel in America could be for American audience. At the same time, Cooper was also the first novelist to address, as Hawthorne, Melville and James later did, the specific sort of difficulties faced by an American writer.

Cooper's preeminence as one of the world's most popular novelists was acknowledged, directly or indirectly, not only by all important American writers of his time but also by most of his British and Continental peers, including Goethe, Scott, Balzac, Sand, and Trollope. Many of his novels were translated into various foreign languages and appreciated as the work of "the American Scott" in the days of his popularity. Despite all the contributions attributed to him,

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[7]See Early Cooper and His Audience, 182. Wallace asserts that Cooper formed the taste and expectation of the American audience, and that such writers as Hawthorne, Melville, and Stowe consciously strove according to his or her own temperament to satify the prevailing taste and expectation of the audience.

America's first popular novelist, oddly enough, was for many years also one of the most critically unpopular figures in the canon of American literature. Although in recent years more and more critical attention has been paid to Cooper, there is still an uncertainty about the rightful place of America's first successful career novelist, about the value of his work and the meaning of his life. Problematic almost from its inception, the course of Cooper's career has always puzzled his critics. "In his substantial character," observes Vernon L. Parrington, "was embodied what may well appear no more than a bundle of contradictions.... No other major writer, unless it be Whitman, has been so misunderstood, and no other offers a knottier problem to the student of American letters."[8]

The contradictions in Cooper-- both in his character and in his career-- are what have most interfered with a proper evaluation of his significance. To critics and historians he is a major figure in the development of American literature, but his inconsistencies and perplexities make him difficult to deal with for the purpose of either literary criticism or cultural history. To most students, and to the general public as well, he is misunderstood as America's "earliest novelist" who wrote a series of children's books called Leatherstocking Tales,

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[8]Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, II: The Romantic Revolution in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, INc., 1927), 214.

although not that many adolescents today still have the interest to read these novels. The reason why Cooper's reputation has been at odds with his achievement is a complicated phenomenon, which can be attributed to a number of causes and examined from different angles. Before we try to analyze Cooper's character in the specific context of his life and works, let us first turn to the dimensions of Cooper's contradictory character provided by critics and historians.

Cooper's contemporaries, even the most sympathetic ones, were often at a loss to understand his temperamental mind and behavior. While his early works were received with enthusiasm by both critics and the reading public, and his early Leatherstocking Tales and in particular his sea fiction gained him a reading public unprecedented in American literary history, his early success as a popular novelist was diminished when the Whig press began to criticize the political novels written during his years in Europe. The political attacks on Cooper were not confined to his political writings, but aimed at all of his works. Although Cooper retaliated against the press with numerous libel suits, he only succeeded in silencing his attackers. He was never able to restore his popularity among the critics and the public.

After Cooper's death, relatives and friends insisted that his character had been badly misunderstood, and his

achievements as America's first novelist unfairly judged. At a meeting held in New York on February 24, 1852 to commemorate and honor the novelist, Bryant, Irving, Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Longfellow, Simms, and most of the republic's other leading men of letters gave their praise for Cooper's accomplishments, and especially for his contribution to the building of an American literature. The compliments, as McWilliams notes, "were remarkably similar. At the time of Cooper's death, his countrymen continued to think of him as the painter of American landscape, the pioneer in the sea novel, and the patriot who proved that American materials were viable for fiction."[9]

In his speech delivered at the Cooper Memorial Meeting, William Cullen Bryant, who had known Cooper for thirty years, was trying hard to direct the public's attention to what he saw as "the creations of Cooper's genius."[10] Daniel Webster hailed Cooper as one who had dutifully accepted the challenge to nurture a republic in the new world. "Mr. Fenimore Cooper," he declared,

> showed the power, imbued with deep principle, of amusing, and to a great extent enlightening the rising generation, without any injury to their morals or any solicitation of depraved passions. This is his great praise; and what is more

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[9]George Dekker, and John P. McWilliams, eds., Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973) 26.

[10] See William Cullen Bryant's "Discourse on the Life, Genius, and Writings of J. Fenimore Cooper" quoted in Precaution (New York: W. A. Townsend and Company, 1861), XI.

> honorable, and what is more likely to endure, than the fame that is secured by writings of this tendency-- full of amusement and information, founded on our own American habits, on our own American scenery, and therefore likely to go on improving the generations which are to succeed us, and in transmitting the original American character from his generation to the generations which should succeed him?[11]

Despite such evaluations, Cooper's literary stature continued to remain low throughout the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth. As a matter of fact, Mark Twain's notorious 1895 essay, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," accused Cooper of committing record-breakng offences against literary art and almost buried his reputation permanently.

A revival of serious interest in Cooper did not begin until after D. H. Lawrence's Studies in Classic American Literature published in 1923. Then, one by one, Cooper's works were dusted off and began to be treated with objectivity and seriousness. This revival was also aided notably by Boynton's biography in 1931, by Spiller's Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times (1931), and by Grossman's contribution of a critical study of Cooper's career published in 1949. Dorothy Waples' fine book on Cooper's politics, in 1938, also served well in putting Cooper's works within the highly political context in which they were authored. These studies of the 1930s and 40s

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[11]Fletcher Webster, ed., The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1903), 502.

provided valuable data for the subsequent appraisal of Cooper, and the occasion of the centennial of Cooper's death in 1951 prompted, in a series of essays addressing different aspects of his life and career, a special issue of New York History magazine devoted entirely to Cooper.

Twentieth-century criticism of Cooper's works is in general far more diverse than that of the nineteenth century. Still, until in recent years, this criticism has tended to follow one of the two critical paths laid out in the early decades of the present century when Cooper basically had two reputations: that of the romancer who entertained his audience with indulgently constructed stories of adventure, and that of the critic who attempted to instruct his audience in his unattractive novels of social commentary.

Those who stress the romantic aspects of Cooper's accomplishments view Cooper largely through mythic readings of the Leatherstocking novels, the most prominent of which was D. H. Lawrence's the highly-influential essay on Cooper in his Studies in Classic American Literature. The evaluation of Cooper begun in Lawrence's essay was extended and elaborated in a long series of articles and books, most influentially, Richard Chase's The American Novel and Its Tradition, R. W. B. Lewis' The American Adam, David Noble's The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden, Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land, Leslie Feidler's Love and Death in the

American Novel, Richard Slotkin's Regeneration Through Violence, Bewley Marius' The Eccentric Design, and Joel Porte's The Romance in America. These mythic readings of Cooper all center their attention on Natty Bumppo, a hero in America's pathless wilderness whose adventurous stories, as these critics assert, were utilized by the author to define and explain certain "mythic" aspects of the American culture and experience.

Another major critical approach to Cooper in the twentieth century is the socio-political reading, which is influenced to a large extent by the biographies of Cooper by Boynton, Grossman, Lounsbury, Spiller, and Dorothy Waples' The Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper. The socio-political reading of Cooper has produced in the past thirty years a multiplicity of essays and books, the most influential being Kay Seymour House's Cooper's Americans, John P. McWilliam's Political Justice in a Republic, Russell Kirk's The Conservative Mind, George J. Becker's "James Fenimore Cooper and American Democracy", and Robert H. Zoellner's "Fenimore Cooper: Alienated American."

In the section on Cooper in Earl N. Harbert's Fifteen American Authors Before 1900, James F. Beard, one of the leading Cooper scholars, provides us with an excellent overview of the twentieth-century criticism of Cooper. His division and classification of twentieth-century criticism is comprehensive as well as convenient as a useful reference

to the history of trends in twentieth-century Cooper scholarship. Dividing the studies of Cooper into four general categories: "Source Studies," "Influence Studies," "Cooper and His Age," and "Cooper as Artist," Beard summarizes what he sees as the primary areas of concentration pursued by critics and historians.

In the section "Source Studies" for instance, Beard notes certain barriers that exist to a thorough understanding of Cooper's fiction in relation to his mind and age:

> Since no catalog of Cooper's reading or library is or can be complete, and since personal information sufficiently detailed to confirm real-life sources is largely missing, source studies have usually depended on evidence in published works, a circumstance that has complicated research. Cooper was an omnivorous reader of fiction in his youth and nonfiction in his maturity, collecting and dispersing the equivalent of several private libraries; and he registered sensitively and retentively in his writings impressions of an extremely varied life.[12]

For all the difficulties, critics, as Beard points out, have begun to engage in diversified types of Cooper studies in the 70's and early 80's.[13] In A World by Itself H. Daniel Peck sees Cooper's fiction "as an imaginative world with structures, tensions, and resonances of its own" and examines the flow of images running in the space of his

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[12]James Franklin Beard, "James Fenimore Cooper," Fifteen American Authors Before 1900, ed. Earl N. Harbert (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 94.

[13]See Beard's "James Fenimore Cooper."

novels.[14] By using a psychological approach in his Fenimore Cooper: A Study of His Life and Imagination, Stephen Railton examines the relationship between Cooper's emotional life and his literary career, between the works of his imagination and the needs of his psyche.[15]

In recent years, our view of Cooper has been broadened by a flux of attitudes and approaches. In Early Cooper and His Audience, James Wallace gives us some insights into the inner realities of Cooper by his study of America's first novelist in relation to the audience of his time. In The American Abraham, Warren Motley examines Cooper's dominating theme of patriarchal authority and offers insights into the relationship between the author's art and his evolving position in family and society. James Fenimore Cooper: New Critical Essays edited by Robert Clark includes eight articles by established Cooper scholars as well as by relative newcomers to Cooper studies; these essays discuss different aspects of Cooper's writing that had been held in oblivion by previous orthodoxies. For instance, in "Instructing the American Democrat: Cooper and the Concept of Popular Fiction in Jacksonian America" Heinz Ickstadt

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[14]H. Daniel Peck, A World by Itself (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 16-17. Peck claims that Cooper gives to American pastoral a quality of permanence, that as an artist, his deepest wish was to see the American landscape as organized, strutured space.

[15]Stephen Railton, Fenimore Cooper: A Study of His Life and Imagination (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

studies Cooper's political beliefs and analyzes the thematic and structural tensions and ambiguities in several of his novels in connection with the democratic ideology of the Jacksonian age.[16] In another article, "Rewriting Revolution: Cooper's War of Independence," Robert Clark pursues the question of how Cooper portrays the American Revolution, and how this knowledge may help people understand the United States today.[17] Diversified as their chosen approaches are, the contributors to the book have offered scholarly research into Cooper's conditions of production, and also brought to our view some new angles from which to study the problems and inconsistencies that haunt his writing.

Noticeably, the scope of the current Cooper scholarship is also enriched by some evocative studies that recently came out on ideology, history and culture in the early period of American literature. Robert Clark's History, Ideology and Myth in American Fiction, 1823-52, Philip Fisher's Hard Facts, Michael Gilmore's American Romanticism and the Marketplace, Carolyn Porter's Seeing and Being, Cathy Davidson's Revolution and the Word, and Sacvan Bercovitch's Ideology and Classic American Literature are some of the excellent studies which, though not directly

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[16]Heinz Ickstadt, "Instructing the American Democrat: Cooper and the Concept of Popular Fiction in Jacksonian America," James Fenimore Cooper: New Critical Essays, ed. Robert Clark (Vision and Barnes & Noble, 1985), 16.

[17]See Clark's New Critical Essays, 189.

devoted to Cooper, have definitely broadened the dimensions of Cooper scholarship and pointed to some new routes that have promising prospects for a deeper understanding of the novelist.

Since Lawrence sparked critical interest in Cooper, Cooper's reputation, by and large, has rested not on the whole of his work, but rather on The Leatherstocking Tales. Yet, in view of the diversity of his writings, the five Leatherstocking novels comprise less than one-sixth of Cooper's fiction, and represent only one of the half-dozen varieties of the novel form that he explored as an American writer. Apart from the scholars of nineteenth-century American literature and politics, few have read any of Cooper's fiction beyond the adventures of Natty Bumppo. Although the continued interest in Cooper has resulted in a growing scholarship in his social and political ideas as reflected in his various writings and brought us some hopeful signs of change in this pattern of neglect, a large part of his work still remains to be studied before the knotty problems surrounding America's founding novelist can be adequately resolved and the significance of Cooper's accomplishments fairly judged.

The Littlepage Manuscripts, a trilogy of novels Cooper wrote in 1845 and 1846 to defend the interests of the landed aristocracy during the Anti-Rent Movement in upstate New York, fall into the category of the novels which are often

considered as Cooper's "mimor works" and therefore have received much less critical attention. Virtually ignored at the time of their publication, the three Littlepage novels began to receive serious critical attention only in this century, but even that recent attention has remained relatively slight. In fact, none of the critical studies published to date has focused on the Manuscripts as a whole unit although books about Cooper and his works have included discussions of the novels in the trilogy.

In their studies, Robert Spiller, James Grossman, Kay Seymour House, and John McWilliams all have discussed certain aspects of Cooper's Littlepage trilogy, but their concerns with the Manuscripts mainly serve to illuminate their respective broad theses rather than to conduct substantial studies of the trilogy.[18] As for book-length studies that include authors besides Cooper or attempt to provide some specific aspects of American literature, some studies do indeed touch on the Littlepage Manuscripts and try to connect the Littlepage characters to Cooper's family background and his social values.[19] Furthermore, several

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[18]See Spiller's Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), Grossman's James Fenimore Cooper (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), House's Cooper's Americans (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1965),and McWilliam's Political Justice in a Republic (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

[19]See Edwin Cady's The Gentleman in America (Ithaca: Syracuse University Press, 1949), Marius Bewley's The Eccentric Design (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), and James Tuttleton's The Novel of Manners in America

critical articles concerning the novels in the Littlepage Manuscripts have appeared over the years, but few have chosen to evaluate the trilogy as an organic unit in connection with Cooper's ideology and the historical facts of the Anti-Rent Movement.[20]

In this study I choose to use Cooper's Littlepage trilogy as my example because I see in these novels an exhibition of both the fundamental elements of Cooper's ideology and the activities of his interior life in connection with the important social issues of his time. Furthermore, these novels also demonstrate that as America's first professional novelist Cooper's primary concern was not merely to entertain but also to educate his audience. Though a form of entertainment, the Littlepage Munuscripts, like virtually all Cooper's other fictional narratives, were addressed to the political life of American society, and intended to instruct the audience in what it meant to be the American democrat and gentleman with "the simple dignity of moral truth and principles."

Marxist criticism holds that artists express the moods

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973).

[20]See the following articles: David Ellis' "The Coopers and New York State Landholding Systems," New York History 35 (1954): 412-422, Granville Hicks' "Landlord Cooper and the Anti-Renters," The Antioch Review 15 (1945): 123-138, William Cosgrove's "Family Lineage and Narrative Pattern in Cooper's Littlepage Trilogy," Forum (Houston) 12 (1973): 2-8, and Charles O'Donnell's "Progress and Property: The Later Cooper," American Quarterly 13 (1961): 402-409.

and ideas arising from their given political and economic enviroments; therefore, in many cases the contradictions in their works and viewpoints can be explained with respect to their class backgrounds. To examine in detail Cooper's social criticism and the biases that mark the Littlepage trilogy, it is necessary to reconstruct in the following chapter the essentials of Cooper's socio-political thought in relation to various social and historical factors of his own life, thus forming an organic link between his social heritage and his ideology.

CHAPTER I

The Essentials of Cooper's Life

Cooper's lifelong interest in politics and his support of a series of American democratic causes are by no means unique or even surprising when viewed in the light of his life and time. In this connection, Vernon Parrington remarks:

> Fenimore Cooper was the barometer of a gusty generation, sensitive to every storm on the far horizon. No other observer of that changing generation suffered so keenly in mind and conscience from the loosening of ancient ties, and none labored so hard to keep his countrymen to the strait path of an old-fashioned rectitude. His busy life covered the middle years of the great shift from an aristocratic order to a capitalistic order, and this revolutionary change provided him ample materials for brooding speculation.[1]

In fact, the era in which Cooper lived saw an accumulation of tensions, divisions, and contradictions in the development of the American political system. The political issues which deeply concerned Cooper and his countrymen eventually grew so controversial and violent that the federal union could no longer resolve them and the whole

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[1]Vernon Louis Parrington, "James Fenimore Cooper: Critic," James Fenimore Cooper: A Collection of Critical Eassay, ed. Wayne Fields (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979), 14.

country was plunged into the Civil War, a war which, although it did not break out until after Cooper's death, grew more and more imminent during his lifetime.

I

The New York Gentry of Cooperstown

The development of Cooper's social point of view, which surfaces clearly in his career as an early American novelist, was strongly conditioned by his family background. Born on September 15, 1789 at Burlington, New Jersey, James Cooper was the son of William Cooper and Elizabeth Fenimore, both of whom came from established Pennsylvania Quaker families. What William Cooper, the novelist's father, did during his years of early manhood we do not know for certain; perhaps he was a little of everything or "a jack of all trades" as Henry Boynton speculates.[2] What we do know about Cooper's father is that in one way or another he did well enough to marry, at twenty-one, Elizabeth Fenimore of Rancocus, New Jersey, who came from a family of substance and manorial stock. During the Revolution and shortly after, William and a partner bought up the rights to an unsuccessful colonial grant of land on Otsego Lake in central New York. After surveying the property, a tract of

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[2]Henry Walcott Boynton, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966), 6.

some 40,000 acres stretching west from the shores of Lake Otsego near the middle of New York state, he opened up the sale of land early in 1789 and started to bring in settlers.

Unlike so many of the great landowners in the state at that time-- the Van Rensselaers, the Livingstons, the Schuylers-- William Cooper did not rent his holdings with perpetual leases, but rather sold them outright, in fee, often with long-term mortgages that sat lightly on the shoulders of the already encumbered pioneer settlers. The ownership of land, he believed, is the most important incentive that heightens human dignity or promotes individual industry. So promptly the land was sold, mostly in small parcels to impoverished immigrants from the populous New England states. It is at this point that William Cooper, in spite of his early poverty and a lack of education, begins to emerge historically, not only as the founder and proprietor of one of the most thriving new settlements in the state, but as a socially and politically prominent figure in the community.[3]

After several years of traveling back and forth between his comfortable New Jersey home and wilderness, William decided to settle his whole family permanently in Cooperstown, the new growing village on the southern shore

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[3]Most of my account of William Cooper leans heavily on Lynan H. Butterfield's "Judge William Cooper (1754-1809): A Sketch of His Character and Accomplishment," New York History, vol.XXX (Oct.1949), 385-408.

of Otsego Lake that was named after him. A family legend, mentioned by most Cooper biographers, portrays William Cooper as determined to settle his family in the wilderness: at the last moment of their moving from New Jersey to Otsego Lake, his wife Elizabeth refused to leave with her husband, and he had to carry her out in her armchair before the family wagons could head for their new home.

It is not surprising that Elizabeth Fenimore was reluctant to move to the depths of the wilderness at Otsego, for it was indeed all rough living there, especially during those first years. To change this, her husband did what he could. Steadily the place grew as its founder's investment prospered. In 1798 the Manor House was supplanted by a statelier dwelling, and William Cooper, who now bore the title of Judge, named it Otsego Hall, apparently thinking himself as the center of power in his community. In characterizing William Cooper, D. R. Fox writes vividly:

> In 1800 he set up a claim to having placed the plough upon more acres than any other man in all America. Having brought his family and a retinue of slaves and other servants,.... he built Otsego Hall, a great, rectangular stone house with castellated roof and gothic windows, surrounded by box hedges and wide lawns trimmed precisely by black gardeners, far surpassing any other home in the old west. This was the citadel of Federalism and the council-place for party methods for the Otsego country, for not only did Judge Cooper serve nine years as first judge of the county and two terms in Congress, but he rode far and wide in the cause of Jay and later Aaron Burr, always preaching the .... doctrine that governments have better be left to gentlemen, and that simple folk

should vote as they were told.[4]

The New York aristocracy, to which the residents at Otsego Hall belonged, was naturally the ruling class: essentially aristocratic, agricultural, and conservative. Such rich men as General Philip Schuyler, Gouverneur Morris, and the great Albany Patroon Stephen Van Rensselaer were not only leaders in their own communities but men of national prominence. "In the new state of New York", as George Dekker writes, "because they owned so much of it, they often seemed more important than Hamilton or Jay, whose bases of operation were New York City and Philadelphia and whose connexions were law and commerce rather than with the land. Law, commerce, and land were natural allies in the early Empire State-- it was no coincidence that Hamilton was Schuyler's son-in-law."[5]

In political and social leadership, this class of landed gentry strongly opposed any democractic encroachment on its power, and found the protection of their own interests in the policy of the Federalist party. One of the main Federalistic principles they held firmly was that the chief end of government was the preservation of property, and that property owners ought to direct the government; and

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[4]Dixon Ryan Fox, Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919), 136-137.

[5]George Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: The Novelist (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 1.

hence they saw themselves as the natural leaders of the country. In a frontier countryside where men, defined by their possession of wealth, were naturally classed as gentlemen or yeomen, Judge Cooper apparently represented the ruling gentry who had the power to conduct important affairs according to his belief and enjoyed the privilege of that of the upper class in his community.

William Cooper, most Cooper biographers agree, was a sharp but generous businessman with a thorough understanding of the people who settled on his land. He knew that his success as a landowner depended on how well his tenants progressed, and on how well he dealt with them. His theories of settlement are clearly stated in his one published work, A Guide in the Wilderness, in which he advocated that there should be liberal terms and close cooperation between the original proprietor and his clients.[6] Yet, kind though he may have been as a landlord, William Cooper was a firm Federalist and a strong believer in the Hamiltonian principle of rule by property owners. A good society, he asserts in his book, should be organized in such a way that a blacksmith or a tenant will not be tempted to interfere with the duties of a judge or landlord. Serving as Judge and Federalist Congressman, he made full use of his power to

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[6]William Cooper, A Guide in the Wilderness; or the History of the First Settlements in the Western Counties of New York with Useful Instructions to Future Settlers, introduced by James Fenimore Cooper (Dublin: Gilbert & Hodges, 1810), later published in Rochester, New York, 1897.

wrestle with his opponents to defend the interests of the landed gentry and his party. Sometimes his actions went so uncontrolled that they backfired, benefiting his enemies.

On one occasion for instance, his partisan devotion became so strong that William Cooper procured the indictment of a Revolutionary War veteran and political opponent, Judge Peck, before the Federal Grand Jury of New York for circulating a petition recommending the repeal of the alien and sedition laws. In his account of the episode, Jabez Hammond, a younger neighbour of William Cooper, makes the following comment:

> A hundred missionaries in the cause of democracy stationed between New York and Coopertown could not have done so much for the Republican cause as this journey of Judge Peck, as a prisoner, from Otsego to the capitol of the state. It was nothing less than the public exhibition of a suffering martyr for the freedom of speech and the press, and the right of petitioning, to the view of the citizens of the various places through which the marshal traveled with his prisoner.[7]

Ruthless to his political opponents and firm in action as a Federalist, Judge Cooper worked hard to maintain the ideas of democracy approved of by his class-- the democracy in which wealth and not majority should control government, and the rights of property should take precedence over anything else. So, not surprisingly, things at Cooperstown were ordered in the way the Squire desired as long as he was

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[7]Jabez Delano Hammond, The History of Politcal Parties in the State of New York (Albany, New York: C. Van Benthuysen, 1842), 1:131-132.

in control. As one of Judge Cooper's Federalist friends who had removed to Philadelphia wrote him in a letter: "We are busy about electing a senator in the state legislature. The contest is between B. R. M., a gentleman, and consequently a Federalist, and a dirty, stinking anti-Federalist Jew tavern-keeper called I. I. But, Judge, the friends to order here don't understand the business, they are uniformly beaten; we used to order these things better at Cooperstown."[8]

William Cooper never hesitated to accept the political and physical challenges from his rivals. He once claimed that he could throw any man in the county, and, according to Levi Beardsley's Reminiscences, he was quite serious about finding a man on his patent who could defeat him.[9] It seems that he did not find any match at Cooperstown, but the fatal attack befell him in a nearby city. In December 1890 as Judge Cooper was leaving a political meeting in Albany, he was struck from behind by an opponent and died of the blow.

Elizabeth Cooper was certainly a woman both physically and spirtually strong enough to match a man like William Cooper. She contributed to the Cooper family either twelve or thirteen children (depending on which biographer one wants to credit). Only seven of them survived infancy, and

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[8]Robert E. Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, 24.

[9]Ibid., 25.

only James Cooper and a sister reached the age of forty.[10] It was no easy task to raise such a large family in primitive Cooperstown, especially for a lady who was accustomed to the comforts of gentility, and always detested the fact that she had been forced to play the role of a frontier woman; but she managed the daily affairs of Otsego Hall as a woman of her own will and action.[11]

The parental influence of these two strong individuals is evident in their son's development. Although James Cooper did not completely share what William Cooper stood for socially and politically, his lifelong affection and respect for his father is largely derived from the fact that he was provided with what his heart had always desired.

> At no time in his life, least of all in his youth, could James have been ashamed of his father. Men whom he idolized, such as Governor Jay, welcomed him into their homes precisely because he was William Cooper's son. He could and did take filial pride in the Judge's pioneering achievements, as The Pioneers amply demonstrates. And he could find no fault with a father who, after his rustication from Yale, got him started sucessfully in his second (and probably much wished-for) career as a naval officer; who bequeathed him an ample fortune; and who left him a name with which the snobbish De Lanceys were not unwilling to be allied.[12]

In a letter to his wife many years after the death of his father, James described William Cooper as "my noble

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[10]See Boynton's James Fenimore Cooper, 14.

[11]Boynton provides some interesting family stories about Cooper's mother in the first chapter of his book, 16-17.

[12]See Dekker's James Fenimore Cooper: The Novelist, 7.

looking, warm-hearted, witty father, with his deep laugh, sweet voice and fine rich eye, as he used to lighten the way, with his anecdote and fun."[13] A noble and witty Federalist squire as he was in a pioneering context, the elder Cooper could not have been a satisfactory model for his son, whose life saw the radical changes on the political and economic scene in Jacksonian America. Yet there can be little doubt that the example of his father greatly influenced the development of Cooper's political philosophy.

II

The Education and Associations

When James Cooper was brought to Cooperstown in 1790, he was only fourteen months old, too young to care about the reason his mother had hated to be moved into a different home on this new settlement called Cooperstown. As the boy grew up on the banks of Otsego Lake, he witnessed the frontier continually being pushed back, and always found a fascination in the strange darkness of the neighboring wilderness. Yet even the upstate New York frontier of Cooper's youth was by no means apolitical. As Dorothy Waples points out, "there were New York banks which refused to do

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[13]James Fenimore Cooper, The Letters and journals of James Fenimore Cooper, ed. James Franklin Beard, 6 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univeristy Press, 1964), 3:41.

business with Democrats, factories which would not sell stock to them, and even a parson in a county familiar to Cooper who declined to christen an infant Thomas Jefferson."[14]

James Cooper was educated at the hands of a fierce Tory, the Reverend Thomas Ellison, and in the company of sons of the Van Rensselaer, Jay, and Livingston families. This education was continued at Yale, which, although not as strongly Federalist as some colleges at the time, was nevertheless clearly administered under the Federalist ideology.

This predominant Federalist education of virtually all New England colleges can perhaps best be illustrated by the example Waples cites regarding the riot that broke out during commencement exercises at Columbia in 1812:

> Two years after James Cooper's coming of age, there was a riot at the Commencement exercises of Columbia because the provost withheld the diploma from a young man who uttered anti-Federalist statements in his graduation speech. There on the platform was the diploma, signed and sealed, and there was the bold young man with his college credits receipted in full; but there was the speech, too, the surprise of it still vibrant in the hall; and a respectable New York college had to make Federalism a prerequisite.[15]

As a student at such institutions, Cooper undoubtedly received the education his father wanted him to have. Yet

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[14]Dorothy Waples, The Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), 12.

[15]Ibid., 11-12.

his learning was not limited to Otsego Hall and the classroom. In exploring the world and its people, Cooper began to associate with those who were politically and socially close to his family and drew his admiration. Among the families that Cooper became intimate with, and remained close to throughout his life, were the Jays, a very wealthy family who through their marriages had allied themselves with the leading families in the Colony.

John Jay was a political ally of William Cooper, who had campaigned for him when Jay ran for Governor of New York in 1792, and they became intimate friends after the elder Cooper was elected to Congress.[16] Jay's son William was one of Cooper's elite classmates at Mr. Ellison's family school in Albany, and later the two were close friends throughout their lives. As a welcome guest to the Jay household, Cooper knew the family very well and had a deep reverence for the fine qualities of John Jay. Some critics contend that it was Governor Jay, rather than Judge Cooper, that became James Cooper's model for the American gentleman. In Notions of the Americans (1828) Cooper described the Jay family and the Governor himself in great affection:

> I scarely remember to have mingled with any family, where there was a more happy union of quiet decorum, and high courtesy, than I met beneath the roof of Mr. Jay. The venerable statesman himself is distinguished, as much now, for his dignified simplicity, as he was, formerly, for his political sagacity, integrity, and

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[16]Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper, 10.

firmness.[17]

As one of the chief civil leaders in the revolutionary regime in New York, and later holder of many prominent national positions, John Jay represented for Cooper not only a man of fine temperament but a social class and a way of life he wanted to associate himself with. For Cooper, the Jays "combined beautiful manners with moral greatness" and "they became a kind of paradigm of what an American Gentleman and his family should be."[18]

The Jays remained Cooper's life-long friends and his close association with them had a strong impact on the forming of the novelist's mind and social values. Though restless in the classroom at Yale, Cooper certainly had a mind willing to learn from the Jays about how to become the American Gentleman.

After being expelled from Yale for misconduct, Cooper returned to Cooperstown and stayed at home for about a year as he waited for his father to determine what next to do with him. Concluding that a career as a Navy officer would be best for his son, the Judge sent him to sea in the fall of 1806. The ship chosen for Cooper's training voyage was the Stirling, a merchant vessel trading between New York and London. For about a year, the young man stood before the

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[17]James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of the Americans, Picked Up by a Travelling Bachelor, ed. R. E. Spiller, 2 vols (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1963), 1:88.

[18]Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper, 11.

mast as a common hand, braving all the discipline of rough weather and desperate physical exertion in the Mediterranean as well as the Atlantic Ocean. The rigorous life as a seaman on the Stirling was a sharp contrast to the comforts found in the sanctuary of Otsego Hall at Cooperstown; and the crew Cooper worked with was composed of Portuguese, Scottish, Canadian, Prussian, Danish, Spanish, and English, as well as American. The adventures the young Cooper had on board were very different from the stern glimpses of a harsh world which Melville so strikingly described in his Redburn and Moby-Dick, but the education Cooper received on the sea was certainly something no professor at Yale could teach him. This first-hand experience undoubtedly enriched Cooper's life and later enabled him to become the first American novelist of the sea, a nautical biographer, and a historian of the United States Navy.

The young man's strenuous apprenticeship on the Stirling fulfilled his father's expectations. In January, 1808, Cooper became an officer of the United States Navy. Eager for active duty at sea, Cooper found his assignments in the Navy disappointing to his high hopes as a naval officer. In May of 1810 Cooper requested a year's leave to attend, he said, to his "private affairs" left unsettled after the death of his father in December 1809. The "private affairs" Cooper had to direct his attention to at that time included two things: he had to help administer the Judge's

complicated estate; and more importantly, he was then busy courting the eighteen-year-old daughter of one of New York's oldest families, the DeLanceys.

The decisive attribute that forms one's marriage varies from one person to another; and in Cooper's case, the nature of his marital commitment to Susan DeLancey was probably both romantic and practical. In a letter to his brother written a week after his furlough had been granted, Cooper gave some reasons that had triggered his romance.

> Like all the rest of the sons of Adam, I have bowed to the influence of the charms of a fair damsel of eighteen-- I loved her like a man and told her of it like a sailor. The peculiarity of my situation occasion'd me to act with something like precipitancy-- I am perfectly confident, however, I shall never have cause to repent of it-- As you are cooly to decide, I will as cooly give you the qualities of my mistress. Susan De Lancey is the daughter of a man of very respectable connections and a handsome fortune-- amiable, sweet tempered and happy in her disposition-- she has been educated in the country-- occasionaly trying the temperature of the City-- to rub off the rust-- but hold a moment, it is enough she pleases me in the qualities of her person and mind--
>
> Like a true Quixotic lover, I made proposals to her father-- he has answered them in the most gentlemanly manner-- You have my consent to address my daughter if you will gain the approbation of your mother-- He also informs me that his daughter has an estate in this County of Westchester in reversion, secured to her by a deed in trust to him-- and depending upon the life of an aunt Aetat 72-- so you see Squire the old woman can't weather it long.[19]

Cooper's marriage to the daughter of another wealthy New York gentry put an end to his naval career but aligned

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[19]Letters and Journals, 1:17-18.

his life more closely to the interests of the landed gentry. In analyzing the common ground on which the two families gathered their wealth, Spiller observes:

> The DeLanceys inherited Huguenot blood, the Dutch patroon system of lamd tenure, an American Tory political philosophy, and the property of the Heathcotes with whom they had intermarried. William Cooper had bought land in large tracts and sold it in small; the DeLanceys had inherited land in large tracts and rented it in small. To both land was the measure of wealth and of worth, and both families had much of it.[20]

In marrying Susan Augusta DeLancey of Heathcote Hall, not only did James Cooper of Otsego Hall locate the right match for his passion and romantic imagination but he also won from the Delanceys a dowry that would have certainly pleased Judge Cooper. Apparently the fact that his wife was a DeLancey had a significant impact on his life and social philosophies. In this regard, the marriage was more than a romance to Cooper-- more even than an acquirement of a certain added share of the world's wealth which his wife brought to him. By being wedded to this devoted and charming lady with the DeLancey surname, Cooper in fact strengthened his ties and commitment to a social system composed of those whose main interests were economically rooted in the soil and whose political convictions leaned heavily on their conservative doctrines. The individuals who had established this social system and consequently enjoyed the privileges of the "governing class" in New York State (such people as

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[20]Spiller, Fenimore Cooper, 61-62.

the Jays, the Van Rensselaers, the DeLanceys, and Judge William Cooper) were mostly those whom Cooper was either related to or personally knew; so it is little wonder that Cooper retained the social values he had grown up with and that he remained loyal to this class of people when controversies and crises arose.

III

Cooper's Pen

Cooper and DeLancey were married on January 1, 1811. For the first eleven years of their marriage the Coopers led the kind of life their class had defined for them: They collected profits from their estates and fulfilled the role of a landed gentry. At the beginning and end of this period Cooper resided in Westchester County, close to Susan's family; from 1814 to 1817 he lived in Cooperstown, close to his mother. During this period, Cooper adopted the duties of the Federalist gentleman, whose function, he contended, was both to serve and to guide society. Socially active, he became an officer in the state militia, worked as secretary for several Bible and Agricultural Societies, campaigned briefly for the Federalist Party. But unfortunately, in none of these public services did Cooper manage to distinguish himself, and in the meantime, his inherited wealth began to shrink considerably due to negligence largely on the part of

his brothers. When William, the last of his older brothers, died in 1819, Cooper found himself a "nominal administrator of a ruined inheritance."[21]

Not only did Cooper have to undertake the management of the remaining estate but he took the financial responsibilities of his brothers as well. He speculated heavily in land deals of various kinds and in a whaling vessel, but he succeeded only in enlarging his own debt. By 1820 Cooper needed money badly. About that difficult time Cooper himself did not mention in any of his writings, at least not according to the existing documentation, but his "accidental" decision to pick up a pen and write a novel probably had a bearing on the fact that the reality of his position as a landed gentleman had fallen short of his and others' expectations for him; so his venture to write was partly to seek a retreat from the realities which had disappointed him and, partly to prove his worthiness as the son of Judge Cooper. In James Beard's words, "James fulfilled them (his father's dreams), in his own way, only after the prospect of utter financial ruin supplied a sufficient motive for exertion."[22]

Although at that time, the profession of writing for a living was not considered a decent job for a "gentleman," Cooper understood early in his literary career that the

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[21]Boynton, James Fenimore Cooper, 71.

[22]Letters and Journals, 1:XXI.

power of his pen was as real as the power of public office; thus for him it was an occupation worthy of a gentleman whose father had once hoped to see him in high office. In fact, he wrote in Precaution (1820), his very first novel, that 'Books are, in a great measure, the instruments of controlling the opinions of a nation like ours. They are an engine alike powerful to save or to destroy.'[23] So 'popular writers of high character,' he believed, were the most effective communicators in the public service.[24] His conception of the public dimension of the role of an American writer was indispensable to the nation's democratic principles because the public had to be constantly reminded of, or instructed in, the moral virtues and the civic consciousness needed to maintain American spiritual independence. In a letter to a friend, Cooper wrote:

> You have appreciated my motives, in regard to my own country, and it has given me great satisfaction. Her mental independence is my object, and if I can go down to the grave with the reflection that I have done a little towards it, I shall have the consolation of knowing that I have not been useless in my generation.[25]

With his pen Cooper proved his worthiness to himself as well as others and acted out his public role as a man of letters writing fiction, history, and political treatise. During the early phase of his authorship, Cooper was content

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[23]Quoted in Beard's The Letters and Journals, 1:XXII.

[24]Ibid., XXII.

[25]Letters and Journals, 2:84.

to conduct his fictional experiments unprecedented in American literature for their variety and apparently very happy about the favorable reception of his novels by the reading public both at home and abroad. Politically, he was pleased with the general tone in the evolution of American society and institutions; personally he was thrilled by his phenomenal success as America's first professional novelist. [26]

This "era of good feelings" is well noted in Notions of the Americans, his first nonfictional book written during his voluntary exile in Paris. Intended as a reply to critical European accounts of America in general, the book defends and glorifies American political institutions. American society, Cooper projected, was an ideal republic of responsible and sober citizens in which American democracy revolved around a few treasured concepts: a maximum of individual liberty, a minimum of governmental legislation, the checks and balances provided by the Constitution, universal suffrage and the beneficial power of public opinion and common sense.[27] These democratic concepts, Cooper believed, were the embodiment of Reason in American political system and social relations, and they established a just balance between individual freedom and collective

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[26]After the success of his first novel, Precaution, Cooper published in succession The Spy (1821), The Pioneers (1823), The Piot (1824), and Lionel Lincoln (1825).

[27]See Cooper's Notions of the Americans.

interest.

While its facts and statistical predictions were by no means untrue, Notions, written under Cooper's impulse to defend his country's egalitarian principles and ideology, did give an exaggerated utopian impression of the moral and political character of American democracy and provided little impression of the gathering forces of economic, social, and political discontent which were soon to effect a practical revolution in the traditional values of American life. In fact, the unfavorable reception of Notions at home was the first in a long chain of circumstances which adversely challenged Cooper's political consciousness and moral principles.

In Europe from 1826 to 1833, Cooper's commitment to the idea of the republic greatly increased and he tended to associate the American political system with the happiness of the entire humanity.[28] He had witnessed the revolution of 1830 in Paris and observed at close range and in full empathy the ineffectual struggles of liberal friends like Lafayette to make republican principles prevail. Consequently his preoccupation with political issues dominated the later phase of his career; it led to his fall from grace with his audience at home. The year of 1830, many critics assert, actually concluded his happiest time as a

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[28]Cooper revealed his concern with the politics of Europe and America in some of his letters. See Letters and Journals, 2:76, 126 and 295.

beloved popular writer although Cooper himself could not possibly have realized it.

In effect, after 1828, American literary circles became uneasy with Cooper's involvement in European affairs; when his "European trilogy," namely, The Bravo (1831), The Heidenmauer (1832), and The Headsman (1833), came out, they were not well received by either the reading public or critics. Not only were these three novels set in Europe, but they had a very obvious and central concern with the nature of European social and political institutions. In each volume of the trilogy Cooper subordinated adventure to instruction; he was obviously more concerned to be correctly republican than to be amusing to his audience. This new definition of his literary role was not appreciated by Cooper's readers since most of them had no desire to concern themselves with foreign politics. What they wanted was the woods or the water, not a lengthy political analysis of European society. When he failed to assume the role as defined by public taste, Cooper found himself deserted and betrayed. He became instead a target for the press and the critics.

Seven years after leaving America in triumph, Cooper returned home in the fall of 1833. Finding himself no longer popular, Cooper felt disenchanted with the new America--especially with some aspects of Jacksonian democracy. In a passage describing Cooper's status upon his return, Boynton

summarizes:

> In 1826 he had sailed happily eastward on a billow of fame and general esteem. Perhaps he overstayed his time, in passing the five-year mark set by Jefferson as a deadline for any American who meant to keep in touch with his country. He had carried the glow and gusto of success at home to a Europe which adored him. But he carried with him also his combative tendency, his touchy Americanism, his brusque manner-- and his liver. The end of seven years found him at odds with France, England, and America.... He was offish with new acquaintances, disliked to be lionized, shrank from the mob. He lacked the ingratiating ways of those who bask in the visible and audible approval of audiences and constitutencies. He believed profoundly in the rights of individuals, but distrusted people in bulk. He was not built for conformity or complaisance. He had a natural talent for putting his finger on the weak spots of a nation or a regime. He was bound for trouble.[29]

A seven-year absence from home had not worn down the novelist's combative vigor, certainly not when he was displeased with the changes that had been developing. Unable to control his agitation and to bring himself into reconciliation with the realities at home, Cooper could not lay aside his pen as he proclaimed in his A Letter to His Countrymen (1834), but instead became more concerned with politics and retained his critical temper towards American democracy in the remainder of his life.

With the announcement of his retirement from the writing of fiction, Cooper and his wife returned to Otsego Hall in Cooperstown to resume a life of a country gentry. However, he could never pull his mind and energy out of

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[29]Boynton, James Fenimore Cooper, 242.

writing and his time continued to be spent productively as a novelist and a social critic. He wrote several politically-oriented books-- The Monikins (1835), Homeward Bound (1838), Home as Found (1838)-- the works that embroiled him in the first of approximately forty libel suits with the press. He returned to the Leatherstocking Tales, completing the series with The Pathfinder (1840) and The Deerslayer (1841).

When The Redskins, the last of his Littlepage trilogy, was published in 1846, Cooper was fifty-seven years old. Like many men of that age, he was, as Satanstoe so plainly indicates, considerably fonder of the past than the present. As he looked at his nation, he found almost nothing but faults, vices, and follies. As a result, the novels of his later phase, unlike those that came out before he went to stay in Europe, are pervaded with a sense of loss and of decline. In these works, certain historic progresses in America are no longer welcomed, but seriously questioned, if not seen altogether as destructive. The Anti-Rent Movement that broke out in the mid-1840s in New York state, for instance, was such a historic event, an event which helped to change the economic and political status of thousands of tenants, but aggravated the anger of the man living in Cooperstown.

CHAPTER II

The Anti-Rent War: An Attack On Cooper's Democracy

Discussing his impressions of America in Democracy in America(1830), Alexis de Tocqueville exclaims:

> Among the novel objects that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, nothing struck me more forcibly than the general equality of conditions. I readily discovered the prodigious influence which this primary fact exercises on the whole course of society.... The more I advanced in the study of American society, the more I perceived that the equality of conditions is the fundamental fact from which all others seem to be derived, and the central point at which all my obervations constantly terminated.[1]

Tocqueville's fellow countryman, Michael Chevalier, records his similar observations of the New World in the following remarks: "In the United States the democratic spirit is infused into all the national habits and all the customs of socity; it besets and startles at every step the foreigner who, before landing in this country, had no suspicion to what a degree his every nerve and fiber had been steeped in

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[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Henry Reeve, 2 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 1:3.

aristocracy by a European education.[2]

Not merely did visiting foreigners note the uniqueness of American democracy but native Americans from Franklin to Cooper also took great pride in proclaiming its virtues. In his "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America," Franklin describes the New World as the lands of freedom where "There are few great proprietors of the soil, and few tenants; most people cultivate their own lands, or follow some handicraft or merchandise; very few rich enough to live idly upon their rents or incomes."[3] Written as an aggressive defense of America's egalitarian principles and social conditions while in Europe, Cooper in Notions of the Americans demonstrated his unbounded faith in the political system of his country and presented it as the most congenial environment for the common man.

The United States was-- still is-- unique in terms of its political system; and undeniably it had no hereditary nobility in the European sense. Therefore, it is not hard to see why many political analysts and historians have concentrated on the growth of democracy as the key issue and the central theme in the nation's history, especially in the

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[2]Michael Chevalier, Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States, ed. John William Ward (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1961), 182-183.

[3]Benjamin Franklin, "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America," The Norton Anthology of American Literature, eds. Gottesman and Holland, 2 vols. (New York: Norton, 1979), 1:275.

period known as the Jacksonian age. However, to view the development of democracy as the only key theme in the period before the Civil War is an incomplete formulation since it overlooks the powerful forces that existed in opposition to this development and moved toward the stratification of society. While the United States was the first great country on earth where there were no positive hereditary ranks and distinctions, where all men were theoretically believed to be equal before the law, and where the road to social and economic advancement seemed open to everyone, in Cooper's time there was still much evidence of a clear stratification of American society. Politically, theologically, and ethnically, Americans, native or landed, could be categorized into different social groups, each holding their own political beliefs and social values. In the case of New York State, the locale of Cooper's Littlepage Manuscripts and many of his other novels, the conflicting social forces underlying the changing class structure there were too obvious to be overlooked.

Since this study is concerned largely with Cooper's idea that the role of America's agrarian gentleman was to be a leading component of its democracy, and because it deals with matters of social stratification and conflicts in his Littlepage trilogy, the social and historical facts examined here will be limited to that segment of the New York landed gentry who had a direct bearing on Cooper's political

opinions and his fiction.

I

Historically, the New York landed aristocracy originated from the patroonships established by the Dutch West India Company in the seventeenth century. To encourage colonialization of the New World, large land grants were made to members of the company who would establish an American colony of fifty or more persons within four years.[4] Those establishing such a settlement were granted the title and "would have baronial authority, with full property rights and complete civil and military control over the people, who would be bound by contract to fealty and military service as vassals."[5] These early grants became the basis of a landed aristocracy, a class which played an important part in the early history of New York State.

When the English took over rule of New York from the Dutch in 1664, this system remained untouched. The Dutch patroons continued to retain their holdings and privileges, although officially patroonships were renamed "manors." By holding to this form of feudalism in which the patroon had unrestricted authority over his tenants, the English hoped

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[4]Henry Christman, Tin Horns and Calico (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1945), 3.

[5]Ibid.

to build up a powerful landed aristocracy so that it would, as the last of the colonial governors expressed it, "counterpoise in some measure the general levelling spirit that so prevails in some of His Majesty's governments."[6]

During the period of the Revolution the power of the large landholders was weakened slightly. Their baronial honors and some of their privileges were outlawed, and small gains in freehold ownership were made with the breaking up of the estates of those manor lords who had fought for the Tory cause during the war. For instance, the large holdings of the DeLanceys, Philipses, and Johnsons were confiscated, fell into the hands of speculators, and then sold in smaller divisions to independent farm families.

For all these gains of agrarian democracy, the landed aristocracy continued to be the dominating force during the post-Revolution years in New York State. As more lands were obtained by the already large landholders, the number of tenants or leaseholders was greatly increased. The leases under which the tenants held land varied from manor to manor, but most were considered "durable" since they were held in perpetuity. To secure the right to farm on the leased land, the lessee had to accept all the terms imposed by his landlord and was required to pay a certain annual rent either in money, crops, service, or some combination of the three, depending on the preference of a given landlord.

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[6]Ibid., 4.

On the Van Rensselaer manor for example, a tenant farmer had to pay a perpetual rent of between 10 and 14 bushels of wheat per 100 acres, plus four fat fowls, and one day's work with a team of horses or oxen. He was to pay all taxes, and was to use the land for agricultural purposes only. The landlord specifically reserved all rights to wood, mines, millsites and other natural resources. The tenant could not sell the property, but only his contract of incomplete sale, with its terms unaltered. When his interest in the farm was sold, the landlord had the option of collecting one-fourth of the sale price or recovering full title to the property at three-quarters of the market price. Thus the landlord reserved for himself all the advantages of landownership while leaving his tenant with nothing but all the obligations to fulfil.

These terms had to be observed strictly by the tenant; any failure to do so gave the landlord the right to seize the property of the tenant.[7] For nonpayment of rent or any violation of the lease, the landlord could issue his own warrants for the seizure and sale of crops and livestock to satisfy his claims, his own testimony usually being all the proof legally required. To execute his claims, the landlord could fix his own price; they could call on the sheriff to collect for him while the tenant could only comply with the

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[7]David Maldwyn Ellis, Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region 1790-1850 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1946), 228.

"conviction" for he had no appeal at all to the courts.

The varieties of leasehold were numerous, but the conditions under which the lands were leased out were always in favor of the landlord, disadvantageous to the tenant and fedual in implication. In most cases, the owner or tenant, whichever he might be called, received in effect only the title to rough land. He had to create his farm for himself, clearing the trees, draining, fencing, building the barn, as well as the house. When the farm became productive, the yearly rent continued indefinitely, or at least as long as the tenant retained his farm. If he decided to sell the farm, he had to turn in part of the money realized in the sale to his landlord on the top of the annual rents he had been paying. Under some leases, possession came to an end with the death of the two or three persons named in the deed or at the end of some period, and the land-- usually a complete farm now-- then reverted to the landlord.

The tenant was under absolute control of his landlord not only in those terms specified in the lease but in other matters as well. He was compelled to buy most of his supplies from the landlord's store, grind his grain at the landlord's mill, and take a loan from the landlord agents. All this was provided to him usually at a higher price, but he had to take it since there were no other alternatives in the neighborhood.

Wrestling with wild lands under these unfair

conditions, tenant farmers worked hard. Yet, in the eyes of the landed aristocracy the tenants were merely a group of laborers who were inferior to them and thus did not deserve any social recognition or respect. They could be scorned and treated in any condescending manner even if they complied with all the rules. In describing how the tenants in Rensselaerwyck were treated at Van Rensselaer's office on the Rent Day, one lad of seventeen recalled bitterly:

> I have been in several different courts where criminals have been arraigned before the bar of justice, and that too for crimes of highest offense, where they had more liberty and more privilege allowed them than the honest and hard-working yeomanry had in that office.[8]

Oppressed under this tenancy system in an age in which democratic impulses elevated the frontier hero Andrew Jackson to the White House, the tenants' resentment, not surprisingly, became stronger and stronger and eventually exploded in the Anti-Rent movement.

Albany, the capital of New York, was the seat of power of this landed aristocracy. Here through the tradition of the patroon system, a few intricately intermarried families controlled the destinies of as many as three hundred thousand people and ruled in a territory of nearly two million acres of land. Among the chief families composing the Hudson River gentry in Jacksonian times were the Van Rensselaers, Livingstons, Schuylers, and Jays. Lesser-known

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[8]Christman, Tin Horns and Calico, 12.

landholders and land speculators such as the Coopers of Cooperstown or the Peter Smiths of Peterboro were in a similar position. As compared to others, the Van Rensselaers were by far the most important in terms of wealth and influence. As the first patroonship granted, their extensive manor, Rensselaerwyck, embraced all of Rensselaer and Albany counties and part of Columbia county, and by 1838 was maintaining between sixty and one hundred thousand tenant farmers, supervised by the eighth patroon, Stephen Van Rensselaer III, who was one of the foremost men in the state of New York.[9]

By the Jacksonian period Stephen Van Rensselaer had been lord of Rensselaerwyck for over sixty years. Under him, the tenancy system had been greatly extended and the profits due to him annually in rents and services were enormous. As an individual, Stephen Van Rensselaer was praised by his admirers as the "Good Patroon," whose fine qualities and generous deeds contributed greatly to the wellbeing of the society. However, like others of his class, he was a firm Federalist and struggled all his life to resist the tide of Jeffersonian democracy. Under a modest and benevolent exterior he had always been energetic in safeguarding against any threat directed at the interests of his empire. In analyzing his good deeds, Christman says of the Good Patroon in the following passage:

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[9]Ibid., 2.

> He had contributed to the relief of the poor; people overlooked the poverty of his own tenants. He had let nearly half a million dollars in rents go uncollected for years; signs of unrest died down among his tenants. He helped build churches on his manor and contributed to their support; the church became a vigorous defender of his privilege, even after his death. He gave money and time to foster agricultural science; the application of new methods increased the productivity of his farms. He campaigned vigorously for the Erie Canal as a public improvement; the project enhanced the value of his manor at the gateway of river and canal. He gave money and personal effort to the advancement of education and culture, including the establishment of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute at Troy in 1824; people disregarded the ignorance generated by the demoralizing leasehold system.[10]

With the aid of this type of generosity and public service, Van Rensselaer's rule brought him sizable returns. Before his death in 1839, his landholdings had extended as far as northern New York and New York City, and he was considered by many as the richest man in the New World.

The death of Stephen Van Rensselaer III marked the end of an era, for his passing affected not only his own tenants but the entire tenancy system. On the surface, the tenants' rebellion and the subsequent decline of the tenancy system all seemed to be started by the last will of the Good Patroon in which he required his creditors be paid immediately from the uncollected rents amounting to nearly $400,000.[11] But when put in the historical perspective, we

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[10]Ibid., 13.

[11]In the second chapter of Tin Horns and Calico, Christman traces at great length how that the Anti-Rent War was sparked by Stephen Van Rensselaer's death. 15-27.

can see that this form of land tenure, though in existence for over two hundred years, was apparently anachronistic in Jacksonian America. So all the factors that led to the Anti-Rent movement had long been there, merely waiting for the right spark to provide the ignition. In fact, long before the death of Van Rensselaer, unrest among tenant farmers desiring freehold ownership had been widespread, and periodic clashes between land agents and renters were common. For instance, in 1751 some of the Livingston tenants in Columbia County refused either to pay their rents or to leave their farms.[12] Forty years after that, some anti-renters launched their attack on the Livingston and Van Rensselaer titles, and a sheriff was killed in suppressing the riot.[13] Major conflict between Van Rensselaer and his tenants had merely been postponed during the rule of the Good Patroon probably because of his understanding that it would be dangerous for him to push his tenants any further. Yet unfortunately, the Good Patroon's two heirs, Stephen IV, educated at Princeton and William Paterson at Yale, had neither any natural sympathy toward the poor and working people nor their father's sophistication when dealing with their tenants.

On hearing that their back rents had to be paid

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[12]Alexander C. Flick, ed., History of the State of New York, 10 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 6:292.

[13]Ibid., 293.

immediately, the tenants were enraged and held protest meetings since few of them could afford to pay immediately; almost none was willing. Moreover, at that point many of the tenants were aware that this was not only an issue of arrearages but an important matter of the democratic principles that had a direct bearing on their personal wellbeing. Some of them pointed out that settling for back rents would only confirm their status as perpetual tenants, not change it. From their point of view, they felt they ought to have both legal and moral rights to the lands since not only had they made the lands productive with their hard toil and paid all the expenses including the taxes, but they had already paid the purchase price many times over in the form of yearly rents and services to the Van Rensselaers.[14]

So at taverns, on wagon seats, even in churches, many tenants expressed their indignation at the landlords. When called on to settle for his back rents, one by one the tenants determined on defiance. Once such a decision was made by one individual, others soon followed suit. Rapidly the Anti-Rent sentiment gained momentum, and a common front was formed by a class of tenant farmers who were resolute to confront their rivals and ready to face the consequences.

A committee representing the lessees of western Albany County was formed but its request to meet with Stephen Van Rensselaer IV, who had inherited his father's holdings west

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[14]Christman, Tin Horns and Calico, 17.

of the Hudson, was rudely denied. Indignant at this treatment, tenants on July 4, 1839 held a mass meeting at Berne, the highest point in the Helderberg mountains of Albany County, and a declaration of independence from landlord rule was formally written to be sent to Stephen Van Rensselaer IV. In this document, the tenants declared:

> We have counted the cost of such a contest, and we find nothing so dreadful as voluntary slavery. Honor, justice and humanity forbid that we should any longer tamely surrender that freedom which we have so freely inherited from our gallant ancestors, and which our innocent posterity have a right to receive or expect from us.... We will take up the ball of the Revolution where our fathers stopped it and roll it to the final consummation of freedom and independence of the masses.[15]

Stephen Van Rensselaer met this declaration by sending a sheriff with writs of ejection against several of the tenants' leaders. But the sheriff and his deputy were outgunned by the furies of the tenants, who, now organized and armed, were determined to resist the implementation of the deceased patroon's will. In December 1839 the so-called Anti-Renters successfully turned back a posse of five hundred men led by Sheriff Artcher and including such persons as former Governor William Marcy and John Van Buren, the President's son. The Sheriff then made his way to Governor Seward and demanded military support. Seven hundred militia men were sent to the Helderberg Hills; in the meantime the Governor issued a grave proclamation warning

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[15]Ibid., 20.

the Anti-Renters of the seriousness of their action and urging them not to attempt to prevent the officers from performing their duties. With the combination of a show of military force and official appeal for law and order, the sheriff's officers managed to "make arrests, levy on property and clear barns and sheds of the crowds" in the rebellious area.[16]

The military suppression did not break the people's will to abolish the feudalism, tyranny and lordly oppression of the patroon system. Tenants continued to refuse payment of their back rents and some even stopped paying rents altogether. Disguised as Indians and dressed in the calico Indian costume-- symbol of the Boston Tea Party and reminder of the original ownership of the soil, they assaulted sheriffs, deputies, and land agents, burned their legal papers, and then humiliated those officers by the traditional American method of tarring and feathering.

From Rensselaerwyck the Anti-Rent movement soon spread throughout the Hudson Valley. During 1844 it passed from a somewhat localized struggle against the Van Rensselaer family to a full-scale, well organized revolt against leasehold tenure throughout the eastern part of the state. The tenants-turned calico army, described by the conservative press as "a terrorizing force," was so popular in the area that New York Evening Post exclaimed that "by

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[16]Flick, History of the State of New York, 6:299.

fall every tenant will have joined the association. Indeed, life and property are both in danger in case of refusal to respond to the cry of 'Down with the rent,' and the articles by which these bands of disorganizers are held together."[17] As more and more tenants actively participated in the movement, head-on clashes between the law-enforcement officers and tenants broke out on a frequent basis. On one occasion in late 1844 three companies of State Militia had to be rushed into the town of Hudson to keep the enraged "Indians" from storming the jail to release one of their leaders, Smith Boughton, known as "Big Thunder."[18]

In addition to their armed resistance, Anti-Renters also resorted to the established legal and political process to fight for their cause. They formed their own associations, printed their own newspapers, held meetings, drew up pamphlets and petitions, filed law suits, and elected representatives to the State Legislature. In fact, the Anti-Rent movement took on much of the structure and many of the functions of a political party. Of the various methods used to motivate the masses and win support, Anti-Rent leaders found the mass meeting an excellent means of energizing enthusiasm and of impressing the politicians. At these meetings the Anti-Rent orators were quite effective in recruiting new fighters among the rural population and in

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[17]Quoted in Christman, Tin Horns and Calico, 90.

[18]Ibid., 129.

confirming the views of those tenants who had always opposed the leasehold. Their speeches were usually calculated to appeal effectively to the prejudice and egalitarian beliefs of the audiences. By calling on American ideals and traditions to justify their activities, the Anti-Rent leaders and orators usually had little difficulty in exposing the evils of the semi-feudal tenancy system and in convincing their audiences of the significance and righteousness of their cause.

Despite the landlords' strong opposition, the persistent struggle of the Anti-Renters eventually came to a victorious conclusion. Through legislative action and judicial decisions, much was done to settle the questions at issue, and the recurrence of such a form of land-holding as the leasehold system was effectually prevented for the future. Legislative enactments passed in 1846 outlawed the landlords' right to seize the goods of a defaulting tenant, and a tax was levied on rent income. A constitutional convention held in the same year amended New York's Constitution, providing that the duration of the time of all leases to be made in the future should be restricted to a small number of years.[19]

Having lost legal support and sensing that popular sentiment was running against them, manor lords began to put

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[19]Edward P. Cheyney, The Anti-Rent Agitation in the State of New York 1839-1846 (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1887), 54.

up their interests for sale. In 1845 most landed proprietors, including Stephen Van Rensselaer, started disposing of their holdings through outright sales. By 1850 the Manor of Rensselaerwyck was no longer extant; many of the leases had been sold outright to tenants; others were purchased by speculators who intended to put them for resale to make some profit.[20] This erosion of the holdings of the landed aristocracy was also sped up by the series of the subsequent court decisions in favor of tenants. In 1850 the New York Supreme Court ruled that the disputed quarter-sale practice, whereby a tenant was required to pay the landlord one-fourth of the price realized from the selling of his farm, was unconstitutional. This legal action gave tenants more rights to the lands they were farming and in turn increased the willingness of the manor lords to sell out.

The Anti-Rent movement put an end to the landed aristocracy as the ruling class of the tenancy system. During and subsequent to the movement, a great proportion of the lands affected became the absolute property of their occupants through purchase, and the economic structures were changed with freeholds in place of leaseholds. Although controversies over titles and leases continued sporadically throughout the nineteenth century, the tenancy system was abolished by the time of the Civil War, and the era of the landed aristocracy was over.

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[20]Ibid., 48-50.

II

The Anti-Rent movement inflicted a fatal wound on New York's landed gentry and thus enraged one noted individual whose family background and political belief had deep roots going back to this inflicted class. In commenting on this movement that broke out in his home state, James Fenimore Cooper said wrathfully:"In our view, New York is, at this moment, much the most disgraced state in the Union... and her disgrace arises from the fact that her laws are trampled underfoot, without any efforts, at all commensurate with the object, being made to enforce them."[21] Admittedly the choleric creator of Natty Bumppo had a reputation for having a hot temper when dealing with certain issues, and in the case of Anti-Rentism his fury came out without any reservation. To justify the role of the landed aristocracy and combat the "heretical" sentiment of Anti-Rentism, Cooper wrote three novels in quick succession: Satanstoe, The Chainbearer, and The Redskins during the years of 1845 and 1846, when the Anti-Rent movement was at its height.

The Anti-Rent movement infuriated Cooper for a variety of reasons. For him it not only undermined the institution of property rights on which his dearly-held agrarian dream

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[21]James Fenimore Cooper, Satanstoe in Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, 10 vols. (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, Publisher, 1893), 8:243.

rested; but it also degraded the family background in which he took great pride. The fact that some Anti-Rent demagogues and supporters happened to be Yankees and Whig politicians and editors added more flame to his indignation. The general leveling spirit of the Jacksonian Age undoubtedly also reduced the enthusiasm of the one-time democrat and made him more conservative and defensive as a spokesman of the landed aristocracy.

Cooper held property rights as the most vital law of all civilization, and believed that "its existence and security are indispensable to social improvement."[22] To stress this point in The American Democrat, Cooper claims that even beasts recognizes the laws of property: "Even insects, reptiles, beasts and birds, have their several possessions, in their nests, dens and supplies. So completely is animal exertion, in general, whether in man or beast, dependant on the enjoyment of this right, under limitations which mark their several conditions, that we may infer the rights of property, to a certain extent, are founded in nature" (TAD, 187).

It is on the basis of these natural laws that man lives and conducts his daily activities; social progress itself is dependent on the execution of man's selfish plans toward the acquisition of property. Asserting that the basis of all

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[22]James Fenimore Cooper, The American Democrat (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1954), 186. All further references to The American Democrat will be cited as page numbers in the text.

human activities and progress are selfish and base, Cooper says:

> The principle of individuality, or to use a less winning term, of selfishness, lies at the root of all voluntary human exertion. We toil for food, for clothes, for houses, lands, and for propery, in general. This is done, because we know that the fruits of our labor will belong to ourselves or to those who are most dear to us. It follows, that all which society enjoys beyond the mere supply of its first necessities, is dependant on the rights of property (TAD, 187).

In the process of this selfish human exertion, Cooper argues that men differ from one to another both in a physical and moral sense, so "the celebrated proposition contained in the declaration of independence is not to be understood literally" (TAD, 108-109). As he remarks in his chapter in The American Democrat entitled "On Station":

> That one man is not as good as another in natural qualities, is proved on the testimony of our senses. One man is stronger than another; he is handsomer, taller, swifter, wiser, or braver, than all his fellows. In short the physical and moral qualities are unequally distributed, and , as a necessary consequence, in none to them, can one man be justly said to be as food as another. Perhaps no two human beings can be found so precisely equal in every thing, that one shall not be pronounced the superior of the other; which , of course, establishes the fact that there is no natural equality (TAD, 136).

Since men are not equal in abilities and property accumulation is the basic motive for all human progress, Cooper contends that "equality of condition is rendered impossible. One man must labor, while another may live luxuriously on his means; one had leisure and opportunity to cultivate his tastes, to increase his information, and to

refine his habits, while another is compelled to toil, that he may live. One is reduced to serve, while another commands, and, of course, there can be no equality in their social conditions" (TAD, 107).

The social inequality is "unavoidable" and it springs, according to Cooper's analysis, from the very equality of rights by which all men can "exercise their respective faculties." Since men are not equal in abilities, their respective efforts yield different results; as Cooper observes, "The active and frugal become more wealthy than the idle and dissolute; the wise and gifted more trusted than the silly and ignorant; the polished and refined more respected and sought, than the rude and vulgar" (TAD, 137).

For Cooper the active, the wise, and the polished could be easily identified among the class of the landed gentry to whom he was intimately attached; in his view they possessed the fine qualities of virtue and talent and were therefore the natural leaders of society. Correspondingly the landless tenants who were only fit to toil in the fields and the newly rich who engaged in trading and manufacturing were equally vulgar and insensitive to the importance of tradition, aesthetic values, and community leadership. In justifying the worthiness of the landed aristocracy, Cooper relied heavily on Jefferson's distinction between the "natural" aristocracy of merit and the "artificial" aristocracy of heredity, a distinction which Jefferson

stated clearly in his letter to John Adams:

> I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents.... There is also an artificial aristocracy founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents; for with these it would belong to the first class. The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. And indeed it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society. May we not even say that that form of government is the best, which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government? The artificial aristocracy is a michievous ingredient in government, and provision should be made to prevent its ascendency.[23]

America, in Cooper's imagination, should be a land of thriving countryside dotted with spendid agrarian communities led and served by the landed gentlemen, the people whom Cooper regarded as a worthy class similar to Jefferson's "natural aristoi." He, as Edwin Cady points out, was said to "believe enthusiastically from the start that a synthesis of his father's agrarian Federalism with Jeffersonian ideals was the rightly destined blue-print for American progress."[24] Although on various occasions he professed to be an ardent republican and a fervent adherent of the Democratic party, the belief that only the worthy

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[23]Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to John Adams: October 28, 1813," The Adams-Jefferson Letters, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 2:388.

[24]Edwin Cady, The Gentleman in America, 105.

class of the landed gentry could best serve American society always had a firm control over his democratic enthusiasm and he was never a leveler or a believer in social democracy.

As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, Cooper's family associations had an intimate bearing on his thinking about the nature of landed property and the position of the landlord in society. Undoubtedly the influence and example of his Federalist father, who had owned vast tracts of land and had erected a large settlement in the wilderness, left a lasting impression upon him. His education in Albany under the rector of St. Peter's Church brought him into close contact with the sons of the Hudson Valley aristocracy and implanted in him a strong respect for traditon and a regard for the paternalistic class of the landed gentry. His marriage into the DeLancey family, one of the most powerful landed families in colonial New York, further fastened his ties with the land-owners. After his marriage in 1811 Cooper settled down in Westchester County for a decade of pleasant living as a country squire and was once quite affluent with the inherited wealth, mostly in land, from their two families. As the first professional novelist in America, Cooper later made his living on his pen rather than on his land, but his close ties with the landed gentry always served as a major inspiration for his political ideas and his novels. In fact, any challenge to the land system of New York, as far as Cooper was concerned, was seen as a direct

threat to his family heritage, his way of life, and his personal interets. Therefore, whenever the interests of the landed aristocracy were at stake, be it immediately related to him or not, Cooper never failed to stand up and fight.

One thing that took place in Cooperstown in 1837 outraged Cooper and resulted in the two Effingham novels. It was a dispute between him and his neighbors over the possession of a piece of property called the Three Mile Point or Myrtle Grove on Lake Otsego. Though owned by the Cooper family, it was a natural recreation spot for inhabitants of Cooperstown and had been kept open to the public for many years. Newcomers to Cooperstown, and some more established residents, actually supposed that the Point was public property. When a group of villagers cut down some of the trees, however, the Judge's son printed a notice against trespassing in the local newspaper. The controversy that followed was handled badly by both sides. The villagers, claiming that one of their rights was threatened, lashed out at the novelist's character-- there was even some talk of removing his novels from the town's library and burning them. Their half of the story was reported in three upstate Whig newspapers which portrayed the novelist as "an oppressive aristocrat."[25]

Finding himself attacked by the villagers and abused by the press, Cooper went on the offensive. First he sued the

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[25]Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper, 154.

newspapers for libel. Then he added to The American Democrat a few strongly worded conclusions about the tryanny of the majority in a democracy. Finally, eager to present his argument against what he saw as the violation of a sacred property right, he wound up writing two tales, Homeward Bound and Home As Found, both appearing in 1838. Homeward Bound is set on board a trans-Atlantic ship and includes a number of nautical adventures, but Cooper's mind is not on any sea story. His focus is on society, on the cultural confrontation between the ship's two camps of passengers. Through the Effinghams, the descendants of the hero and heroines of The Pioneers, Cooper sings the praises of fine qualities of the landed aristocracy and presents them as exemplary Americans. By characterizing Dodge, a Yankee newspaper editor whose manners contain all the vices associated with so-called "democrats"-- inquisitiveness, demagoguery and vulgarity-- Cooper criticizes America's radical tendencies of democracy and cautions his readers against such individuals as Dodge.

Home As Found is an open condemnation of property intruders. Here, the Effinghams return to Judge Temple's mansion in Templeton only to find themselves threatened by the rebellious type Dodge represents. Like Cooper in the case of the Three Mile Point, Edward Effingham now has to defend a piece of land against the greediness of his neighbors. Needless to say, Edward, who appears to personify

Cooper himself, behaves with dignified gentlemanliness throughout the crisis while his radical opponents act like a bunch of vulgar hoodlums; their selfish actions, as Cooper warns throughout the story, not only violate the Effinghams' property rights but threaten to remove the very base of America's democracy.

Democracy seems to be Cooper's primary concern in both his political treatises and many of his novels. But not all major issues pertaining to America's democracy at the time had his attention. For example, Cooper never seriously addressed himself to slavery, obviously because it did not collide with the interests of the landed aristocracy he was safeguarding. However, when the Anti-Rent movement started, it constituted for Cooper the gravest assault on the very foundations of democratic government and the society which he held so dear above everything else. Although the movement, in fact, did not have a direct financial bearing on Cooper, whose main source of income at the time came from his pen rather than his land, it was viewed by the novelist as a direct attack on the class that represented so much for him. Should those unlawful tenants prevail over the legal rights of the individuals Cooper revered and loved so much, all that he cherished in America's democracy would not be safe from the mob. So for Cooper, there was an underlying similarity between the Anti-Rent movement and the Three Mile Point controversy: in both cases " a set of low fellows"

were trying to take something that did not belong to them. As "executor" of the property in question, it was therefore Cooper's duty to stop this type of illegal trespassing.[26]

To address the issue as conclusively as possible and to provide an analysis of changing American social conditions through the microcosm of Littlepage experiences, Cooper deliberately planned his Littlepage Manusripts at the time when the Anti-Rent movement was nearing its climax. In January of 1845 Cooper outlined his plan in his letter to Richard Bentley, his Bristish publisher:

> "The Family of Littlepage" will form three complete Tales, each perfectly distinct from the other as regards leading characters, love story &c, but, in this wise connected. I divide the subjects into the "Colony," "Revolution" and "Republic," carrying the same family, the same localities, and same things generally through the three diffeerent books, but exhibiting the changes produced by time, etc. In the Colony, for instance, the Littlepage of that day, first visits an estate of wild land, during the operations of the year 1758, the year that succeeded the scenes of the Mohicans, and it is there that the most stirring events of the book occur. In the "Revolution" this land is first settled, and the principles are developed, on which this settlement takes place, showing a book, in some respects resembling the Pioneers, though varied by localities and incidents-- In the "Republic" we shall have the present aspect of things, with an exhibition of the Anti-Rent commotion that now exists among us, and which certainly threatens the destruction of our system-- You know I write what I think, in these matters, and I shall not spare "The Republic" in all in which it is faulty and weak, as faulty and weak it has been to a grievous extent in these matters.[27]

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[26]Letters and Journals, 3:274.

[27]Letters and Journals, 5:7.

In the Littlepage novels Cooper based his defense of the landlord's position on two grounds: first, he argued that by establishing their properties out of the wilderness at some risk and sacrifice, the landlords had earned all the rights to their profits; second, he insisted that every society needed men of wealth and intelligence, and the landlords were the capital on the column of American democracy both economically and morally. To convince his readers of this argument, Cooper laid out his trilogy on the three stages of American social and political history by recounting the growth of an estate from colonial times, when the land had to be wrestled from savage Indians and wild beasts, to the 1840s, when men who dressed like Indians and acted like beasts conspired to rob the landlords of their hard-earned possessions. The account is narrated in the first person by three men of successive generations of the same land-owning family, and it is through them that Cooper dramatizes the contributions and merits of the landed gentry in society.

The Littlepage trilogy is interesting both as a defense of the fading landed aristocracy and as a revelation of the intellectual development of Cooper as a novelist and a social critic. It illustrates several important social trends of the time and points to the issues that deeply concerned Cooper: the necessity of property rights in the affairs of civilization, the validity of the social position

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of the landed aristocracy, the struggle between law and liberty, and the cultural and economic conflicts in a hierarchical society. In the following chapters I will focus my studies on the Littlepage novels to examine these issues, and try to account for Cooper's growing alienation from the onward march of a democracy to which he could not reconcile himself.

CHAPTER III

Property Rights: The Base of Civilization

To Cooper, who felt himself to be a passionate advocate of democracy, the Anti-Rent movement of the 1840's was far more than an isolated instance of social disorder. It represented for him the unmistakable evidence of the decay of the democratic values of the American mind and indicated a dangerous contagion of expediency over principle. In the three Littlepage novels, Cooper attempted to trace the history of this decay of principle and to establish "a connection between the facts and incidents of the Littlepage Manuscripts" so as to demonstrate what he held as "certain important theories of our time."[1] One of these important theories that deeply concerned Cooper at the time was the issue of property rights. To stress his point that the landlords' property rights were the sacred fundamental base of society, he used the device of having members of successive generations of the Littlepage family tell their story against a background of land history and developed his

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[1]Cooper, Satanstoe in Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, 8:243. All future references to Satanstoe, The Chainbearer and The Redskins, or Indian and Injin are hereafter cited by abbreviation and page number in the text of Works.

characters in terms of their views on land issues.

I

As mentioned earlier, Cooper held property rights as the most vital law of all civilization, asserting in his political treatise The American Democrat that "its existence and security are indispensable to social improvement." In Cooper's novels, especially the ones he wrote in his late years, many of the evils that seem to threaten his ideal American democracy derive from his villains' vicious greed to acquire and keep the property that they are not legally entitled to. These lawless villains, as described in The Prairie, Home As Found, The Crater, and most noticeably in the Littlepage series, intrude on other people's property under the pretext that they have as equal rights of land ownership in America's "neutral ground" as anybody else; Cooper's novels show the influx into this neutral ground of representatives of various social classes who have claimed their rights of America's land: Yankees, Dutchmen, gentry, tenants, squatters, Indians, blacks and so forth.[2]

To justify the gentry's rights of land ownership in the Littlepage novels, Cooper is very careful to make certain that all property mentioned is legally owned, that there is

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[2]McWilliams, Political Justice in a Republic. See Mcwilliams' Introductory Chapter, 1-31.

absolutely no space to be claimed as the neutral ground. In Satanstoe, Cooper tells how the gentry purchased their family estates from its original owners through the conversation engaged by Corny and Dirck, the two sons of New York land owners:

> "And your father and mine have purchased all this land in company, you say--share and share alike, as the lawyers call it."
> "Just so."
> "Pray, how much did they pay for so large a tract of land!"
> ....
> "There," he said; "that is a list of the articles paid to the Indians, which I have copied, and then there have been several hundred pounds of fees paid to the governor and his officers"(S, 269-70).

The rest of their conversation goes on at great length about what were actually paid to the Indians for the acquisition of the land, the fact that the purchased land was legally registered in the names of their "old gentlemen," and that soon and later it would be passed on to their hands.

In order to validate the Littlepage purchase at Mooseridge, Cooper later has Susquesus, an Indian guide, question that ownership. Corny assures the Indian that the purchase was a fair deal to the Indians, and his father and Colonel Follock actually paid for this land of the Mohawks with the price set solely by the Indians. In explaining how the tract was measured by both sides, Corny describes the occasion as if he were there as an eye-witness:

> "Well, we have the benefit of both grants; for the proprietors actually walked round the estate, a party of Indians accompanying them, to see that all was fair. After that, the chiefs signed a deed

> in writing, that there might be no mistake, and then we got the king's grant"(S, 434).

The deal was of course an incredible bargain for the white, but since it was a contract agreeable to both sides, it had its legal validity not only because of the governmental registration but also because of the agreement of the Indian sellers (For Cooper, the savages proved to be far more honorable than civilized people since the Mohawks never attempted to break the contract, but the government later amended its laws to suit the popular opinions of the majority.). Using Susquesus as a representative of the Mohawks, Cooper has the Indian affirm the validity of Littlepage's estate: "Yes, bargain bargain-- that good. Good for red man good for pale-face-- no difference-- what Mohawk sell, he no take back, but let pale-face keep...(S, 434). Apparently, in reviewing this historical fact of how the Littlepages acquired their land Cooper tries to prove the validity of the gentry's land titles which the Indians had agreed to sell and the King and the laws of New York had confirmed, and at the same time stresses the absolute necessity of strict compliance with agreed contracts, with an obvious intent aimed at the offenses committed by the Anti-Renters a century later.

As the unquestionably legal owner of their estates, the Littlepage family invest tremendous efforts and money to develop their properties. Throughout the Littlepage series, especially in Satanstoe and The Chainbearer, Cooper spares

no pain to present what kinds of hardships, sacrifices, and risks the gentry had to undertake so as to settle and develop their estates. Drawing from his memories of Otsego Hall where his father succeeded in settling thousands of households in the wilderness of upstate New York, Cooper has the narrators use their own experiences and adventures to show what the gentry had gone through in the process of developing and safeguarding their lands in the face of a hostile environment. For instance, as they march through the virgin forests toward Ravensnest in Satanstoe, Corny learns the following facts from Mr. Herman Mordaunt, which are worth quoting at length:

> The clearings of Ravensnest were neither very large nor very inviting. In that day the settlement of new lands was a slow and painful operation, and was generally made at a great outlay to the proprietor. Various expedients were adopted to free the earth from its load of trees; for at that time, the commerce of the colonies did not reward the toil of the settler in the same liberal manner as has since occurred. Herman Mordaunt, as we moved along, related to me the cost and trouble he had been at already, in getting the ten or fifteen families who were on his property, in the first place, to the spot itself; and in the second place, to induce them to remain there. Not only was he obliged to grant leases for three lives, or in some cases, for thirty or forty years, at rents that were merely nominal, but as a rule, the first six or eight years the tenants were to pay no rent at all. On the contrary, he was obliged to extend to them many favors in various ways, that cost no inconsiderable sum in the course of the year. Among other things, his agent kept a small shop, that contained the most ordinary supplies used by families of the class of the settler, and these he sold at little more than cost for their accommodation, receiving his pay in such articles as they could raise from their half-tilled fields,

> or their sugar-bushes, and turning those again into money, only after they were transported to Albany, at the end of a considerable period. In a word, the commencement of such a settlement was an arduous undertaking, and the experiment was not very likely to succeed, unless the landlord had both capital and patience (S, 403-04).

However, the tremendous expenditure in capital and patience needed to establish tenants on such wilderness, as Mordaunt explains to Corny, "are not likely to be of much use to" himself, but he hopes that a century later his "descendants may benefit from all this outlay of money and trouble" (S, 404).

Quite conscious of stressing the point that it really took generations for the gentry's long-term investment to yield profits, Cooper reiterates this fact not merely in Satanstoe but throughout the whole trilogy. In The Chainbearer, Mordaunt Littlepage, Mordaunt's grandson, converses with Susquesus, a longtime friend of his family on both past and present land-settlement problems:

> It was seldom that a landlord, in that day, as I have already said, got any income from his lands during the first few years of their occupation. The great thing was to induce settlers to come; for, where there was so much competition, sacrifices had to be made in order to effect this preliminary object. In compliance with this policy, my grandfather had let his wild lands for nominal rents in nearly every instance, with here and there a farm of particular advantages excepted; and, in most cases, the settler had enjoyed the use of the farm for several years for no rent at all (C, 317).

Although the prospect of collecting some returns has already begun to show on his inherited Mooseridge and Ravensnest by

the time Mordaunt is assigned the responsibility of managing the estates, he claims that a great deal of money still has to be spent on the improvement of the property, leaving actually no income for the landlord. "It was matter of record," as the young landlord tells the old Indian, "that not one shilling had the owner of this property, as yet, been able to carry away with him for his own private purpose" (C, 317). Clearly, using the young Mordaunt's words as testimony, Cooper tries again to refute the Anti-Rent argument that the feudal tenancy system earned for the landlords enormous profits while the tenants were forced to toil as "serfs."[3]

Not only that, but the author also tells us that the landlords had spent large sums to develop their properties and contributed generously to the support of churches, schools, and roads-- one of the opposing arguments the landed gentry frequently made in the Anti-Rent controversy. To call the reader's attention to the generous contributions the landed gentry have made to their communities in all three novels, Cooper makes a special point to show that the Littlepage family has erected and maintained St. Andrew's Church at Ravensnest. Furthermore, the Littlepages are also seen as responsible for initiating the building of mills and roads to benefit the public.

The landlords, as Cooper judges, have earned their

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[3]See Christman's Tin Horns and Calico, 1-15.

claim to the wildness honorably, for in the process of acquiring and developing their lands not only have they invested their money and time, they have also ventured their lives courageously at the time of difficulty. In fact, all generations of the Littlepage and Mordaunt family, when threatened by various land intruders, uncompromisingly stand up to defend their interests. In Satanstoe Corny summarizes Cooper's point when he tells Bulstrode, a British officer who competes with him in the courting of Anneke, that he may finally decide to assist the British army, "But only as a defender of the soil" (S, 291). Provincial as Corny may sound in declaring that he will fight only for his own colony and his own land, it indicates a strong presence of a characteristic sentiment that all the landlords in the Littlepage series seem to share whenever their lands are threatened.

Placing his land above even his own life, Herman Mordaunt, for example, moves from Lilacsbush to Ravensnest because there is a rumor that Ravensnest is under imminent threat of attack. By doing this, Mordaunt intends to give his tenants confidence and to "enable him to infuse new life into their operations" (S, 392). Fully aware of the danger involved, he allows his daughter to accompany him in order to increase the sense of confidence for the community. His decision, as Cooper shows on several occasions, is not made upon impulse but very well premeditated: not only is he

willing to defend his property if attacked; he is also willing to venture the lives of both himself and his family in order to save his property. This kind of active defense of property is even more evident in the younger characters of the gentry, and their brave actions are affectionately depicted by the author. In defending their lands, Corny, Dirck, and Guert, like Herman Mordaunt, fight so fearlessly that it seems as if these young men had intended not to avoid danger but to go off looking for it.

The gentry's determination and courage make them worthy owners of the lands which they bargained away from the Indians; this is especially true when they are compared with their irresponsible tenants. While Herman Mordaunt moves himself and his family into the path of danger posed by the incoming French and the Indians, his tenants are thinking about abandoning their huts and clearings for the sake of safety. When Corny and Guert are looking for hands to drive the invading Indians off Mordaunt's Ravensnest, the tenants, referred to by Corny as "delinquent," have already fled to the nearby woods with their families, not caring what may happen to the settlement as a consequence of the Indians' raid. Because being the tenants, as Herman Mordaunt complains to Corny, they can always abandon their farms without losing much and go to find other settlements to start all over again (S, 391-92). The difference in the respective attitudes toward the lands noted in the landlord

and his tenants undoubtedly carries Cooper's criticism of the Anti-Rent movement: It is the landlords, rather than the tenants, who have secured the prosperity of the lands; therefore they are entitled to lay all their claims to their hard-earned property.

II

Since the validity of the leaseholding was the key issue of the Anti-Rent controversy, it was apparently the immediate concern of the novelist and is frequently discussed in the trilogy. In his effort to refute "the absurdities" that most of the leases were unfair and one-sided in great favor of the landlords, the class of landlords, as represented by the Littlepages, are portrayed as good-hearted gentlemen who treat their tenants with commendable leniency and justice.[4] In Satanstoe for instance, the settlers on Mordaunt's Ravensnest have the freedom to choose their farms and can either buy or lease the lands "on such conditions as suited themselves" (S,

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[4]In both Christman's Tin Horns and Calico and Ellis' Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region 1790-1850, the two historians record the unfair land leases imposed upon the tenants by the landlords. As Christman describes that many settlers were "complelled to take the leases or to leave the premises. Only a few tenants had the courage and the hardihood to refuse the leases and turn to the wilderness to begin their toil anew. The rest remained in a serfdom which was, for all practical purposes, complete." See Tin Horns and Calico, 8.

404). In accounting for this generous practice by which the landlords dealt with their lands, Cooper makes mention of such historical factors as the fact that people were scarce while land was superabundant-- the chief reason historians attribute to the necessity of the generous landleasing practice on the part of the landlords at the time. However, in assuming his role as the defender of the landlords, Cooper goes to great lengths to show how lenient and fair the landowners are when dealing with their land-hungry tenants. In their sincere tones all the Littlepage narrators testify repeatedly that it is the landlords who made all the sacrifices to bring the tenants to settle on their lands, not the other way around, as the Anti-Renters had claimed. In describing how Mordaunt releases his family estate of Ravensnest to Yankee tenants, Cooper has the young man describe the fairness of the deal:

> As soon as our scheme for releting was matured, Frank summoned the occupants of the farms in bodies of ten, to present themselves at the 'Nest, in order to take their new leases. We had ridden round the estate and conversed with the tenantry, and had let my intentions be known previously, so that little remained to be discussed. The farms were all relet for three lives, and on my own plan, no one objecting to the rent, which, it was admitted all round, was not only reasonable, but low. Circumstances were then too recent to admit of the past's being forgotten; and the day when the last lease was signed was one of general satisfaction (C, 318).

A "general satisfaction" is Cooper's description of the conditions under which the tenants took up their farms, for, the leases, offered with such lenient terms, were in the

tenants' favor at the cost of the landlord.

Undoubtedly, in contemplating the defense of the landlords in the Anti-Rent controversy Cooper was then fully aware of the public resentment at the unfairness of the lease terms imposed on the tenants. The historical facts, provided adequately by both Christman's Tin Horns and Calico and Ellis' Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region, show that the landowners, in settling their easily acquired wild lands at the time, had used all kinds of means to attract tenants (for instance, the wide-spread advertising that settlers in upstate New York would be provided with fertile lands with extremely lenient terms). But what those tenants actually got, in many cases, were thin and hilly lands, and the exact rent terms were not set before them until after they had built their farms and cleared the wilderness. Cooper, being the son of the mastermind of Cooperstown, the husband of a DeLancey, and an intimate friend of the Van Rensselaers, of course knew such techniques of a landowner's success, but his task was to conceal rather than publicize it.

In addition to seizing all possible occasions to have his narrators emphasize his points in defense of the landed gentry, the novelist also ventures out from the back stage when he loses his patience to wait. In the preface to The Redskins Cooper says angrily:

> Had the landlords of that day endeavored to lease for one year, or for ten years, no tenants could

> have been found for wild lands; but it became a different thing when the owner of the soil agreed to part with it forever, in consideration of a very low rent, granting six or eight years free from any charge whatever, and consenting to receive the product of the soil itself in lieu of money. Then, indeed, men were not only willing to come into the terms, but eager; the best evidence of which is the fact that the same tenants might have bought land, out and out, in every direction around them, had they not preferred the easier terms of the leases. Now that these same men, or their successors, have become rich enough to care more to be rid of the encumbrance of the rent than to keep their money, the rights of the parties certainly are not altered (R, 462).

The landlords' generosity, as reiterated throughout the trilogy, is often juxtaposed to the ungratefulness of the tenants who are "nothing more than a stomach that is not easily satisfied" (R, 462). In showing that the landlords' leniency backfired on them, Cooper has Mordaunt complain that the landlord's "indulgence that admits of an accumulation of arrears, which, when pay-day does arrive, is apt to bring with it ill-blood and discontent" (C, 317). The very example of back rents clearly refers to Cooper's friend, Stephen Van Rensselaer, who had allowed arrears to accumulate to more than $400,000 on his estates, and it is used here as evidence to confirm the leniency and the good-will of the landlords and to condemn the ungrateful Anti-Renters.

Probably nowhere are the landlords' leniency and the good-will exhibited more vividly than the dramatic interaction between Mordaunt Littlepage and the crooked tenant Jason Newcome in The Chainbearer. In granting Jason

the favorable new lease which he evidently does not deserve, Mordaunt ridicules Jason by making the following remarks: "It is not granted under the notion that you have any right to ask it, beyond the allowance that is always made by a liberal landlord to a reasonably good tenant.... Now the only inducement I have for offering the terms I do is the liberality that is usual with landlords, what is conceded is conceded as no right, but as an act of liberality" (C, 322).

For all the kindness on the part of the landlord, the roguish tenant, in return, has shown his appreciation by becoming more greedy and abusive, as the narrator tells us in the latter part of The Chainbearer. Together with Thousandacres, a squatter figure whose greedy and mean behavior reminds us of Ishmael Bush in The Prairie, Jason conspires to intrude on Morduant's property rights by obtaining the lumber illegally milled out of the Mooseridge patent. When questioned about the illegal mill operated on the Littlepage property, Jason first tries to evade the question by pretending his ignorance of the matter; but when he realizes that his landlord has learned quite a lot about the mill business, he then defends his partner-- his own unlawful act, too-- by telling Mordaunt that "squatters is sich common objects in the new countries" that no one should be bothered by their presence (C, 428).

Cooper was certainly badly bothered by these squatters because their presence posed an open threat to his principle

of property rights. In his efforts to defend property rights and expose vices of the leveling sentiment which, as he warned, was then eroding the minds of the masses, Cooper seizes every opportunity in his Littlepage stories to reiterate what he had stressed in his previous works (most noticeably in his The American Democrat): that property rights comprise the most vital principle of all civilization. In pronouncing the significance of property rights in relation to civilization in The Chainbearer, Cooper chooses Susquesus, an innocent Indian, as an eager student to learn about the secret of civilization and has Morduant tell him:

> 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. Thus it is, too, that the father gives to the son what he has learned, as well as what he has built or bought; and so, in time, nations get to be powerful, as they get to be what we call civilized. Without these rights of property, no people could be civilized; for no people would do their utmost, unless each man were permitted to be master of what he can acquire, subject to the great and common laws that are necessary to regulate such matters. I hope you understand my meaning, Trackless (C, 283).

Cooper looked on all human motives as being basically selfish, and therefore the civilization referred to by Mordaunt is not based on any spiritual belief but rather on man's self love, his corruptible nature. Energized by this

human selfishness, economic progress is seen by Cooper as a process of accumulation for self-consumption only. A child is born into a world filled with material goods earned by his or her forebears and lives by the inherited knowledges and customs. Then the child begins his or her own chosen career by storing up new knowledge as well as new things--charging the society with inexhaustible momentum to move forward. Because it is with the guarantee of the property rights, as Cooper reminds us here, that men are motivated to do their utmost, to advance forward, rather than being caught forever in the past.

By having an Indian receive Mordaunt's teaching, Cooper also gives us a comparison between the white and Indian cultures in connection to the property rights. As the white man has a strong sense of ownership, he lives a civilized life which gives him every advantage and all the power to take over the world. But for lack of a strong sense of individual property rights, the Indian roams about the wilderness, hunting for what he can consume at the moment and living by the rules passed to him by his ancestors. As there is no such concept as property rights which would urge him to produce and possess, he stays haunted by the past, by the traditions his father and grandfather have lived by, while his world is gradually transformed by the invading white civilization.

III

Cooper's concern with property rights is noted not only by many lengthy didactic conversations his narrators initiate but also by the narrative structures of all three stories. In fact, it was Cooper's intention in the Littlepage trilogy to follow a single family of landed gentry through four generations largely by concentrating on the story of their retaining the family estate. The plots of all three novels revolve around the issues related to the families' social and economic security based on the patriarchal land; the main action consists of the young narrator's journey to the family estate, where he confronts the enemy and successfully retains his land and claims his wife. Each generation must prove its right and worthiness to possess its land before a proper marriage can be realized.

In the case of Corny, the narrator of Satanstoe, he must win Anneke Mordaunt from a number of suitors, because not only is she very pretty, she also embodies "a young lady of the better class" (S, 277). Her father, Mr. Herman Mordaunt, as Corny's uncle informs him, "was a man of considerable note in the colony" (S, 271), for "He has talents, a good education, a very handsome estate, and is well connected in the the colony" (S, 287). Whoever marries the daughter of such a man can certainly enjoy a great deal

of benefits, both socially and economically. Corny is quite aware of the material significance of the romance; in acknowledging to Major Bulstrode, a British officer and also his rival, that he too is courting Anneke, he confesses: "I shall expect Herman Mordaunt to settle his estate on his daughter, and her rightful heirs, let her marry whom she may" (S, 380).

To pursue his love, Corny has to compete with Anneke's other suitors, especially Major Bulstrode, who is obviously favored by Mr. Mordaunt. While in New York City, Corny stays close to Anneke, utilizing every opportunity to nurture their love for each other, and although he is fortunate enough to have two occasions to save Anneke's life for which both she and her father have expressed their gratitude, he still cannot obtain any confirmation of his prospects from either the girl or her father. So when Bulstrode declares that Herman Mordaunt is on his side and has given his best wishes, Corny, feeling hopeless, does not know how to respond to his rival.

Only in the action of surveying and protecting the land in the wilderness does Corny finally prove his worthiness and thereby succeed in claiming Anneke's hand. When Mr. Mordaunt announces that he is going to take his daughter to visit land of his own, a tract known as Ravensnest, which is very near the Littlepage and Follock property of Mooseridge, Corny immediately sees his opportunity to forward his suit

with Anneke. Ahead of Corny, as the author tells us, lie two tasks: he must win Anneke and he needs to survey the land in upper New York his father recently bought. For Corny's convenience, the two actions can be accomplished simultaneously. So the latter part of Satanstoe is told against a background of the land history, and the author's theme of property rights is conveyed to the reader in the context of a romance realized in the wilderness.

By changing the scene of the story from city to unsettled country, the author, in effect, accelerates the development of the young narrator. When Corny goes fresh from college to New York City, he is accepted merely as a son of a respectable landowner but he lacks maturity and experience. Most of all, he does not have any definite goal in life. Consequently, some of his deeds there are childish and affect his courtship with Anneke adversely. For example, in having fun while sledding down the main street, Corny nearly runs into the carriage occupied by Anneke and Mary, and this type of sport is disapproved of by Anneke as one for boys, not men. The snatching of the dinner from a house which was actually prepared to entertain Anneke and her father, another mischief by Corny and his friends, is also scorned by Anneke.

However, as Corny advances geographically toward the wilderness estates of the Littlepage and Mordaunt families in upper New York state, he grows rapidly into a man worthy

to be the son-in-law of Herman Mordaunt. Walking side by side with the old gentleman through his wild estate, Corny learns of Mordaunt's philosophy of land ownership as well as his investment plan for Anneke's future.

> Every man who is at his ease in his moneyed affairs, Corny, feels a disposition to make some provision for his posterity. This estate, if kept together and in single hands, may make some descendant of mine a man of fortune. Half a century will produce a great change in this colony; and at the end of that period, a child of Anneke's may be thankful that his mother had a father who was willing to throw away a few thousands of his own, the surplus of a fortune that was sufficient for his wants without them, in order that his grandson may see them converted into tens, or possibly into hundreds of thousands (S, 404-5).

Apparently, through Mordaunt Cooper is again trying to present his anti-rent arguments and defend the landlords' property rights; the principles behind Mordaunt's words are repeatedly emphasized throughout the whole trilogy and all the characters are portrayed in terms of their attitudes to these principles. Naturally, Corny supports Mordaunt's theory of land ownership, and, as a would-be husband, appreciates Mordaunt's thoughtfulness regarding Anneke's future. With the deepening of his understanding of property rights, his relationship with Mordaunt's family becomes more and more mutually intimate and trustworthy as the approaching threats to their estates intensify.

The approval of Corny's love by the Mordaunt is not given until he proves himself by helping defeat the marauding Hurons on the neighboring Mordaunt land at the end

of the novel. When being urged to join the Mordaunts at their estate, Corny has to go there, this time not in his usual role as a companion in entertainment but as a defender of the property. The significance of Corny's role is indicated, ironically, by none but his rival Bulstrode, who is wounded at the time, and thus unable to compete with Corny. In a regretful tone, Bulstrode cries:

> Those of a defender. Oh, that is a battering-ram of itself! This confounded assault on the settlement, which they tell me is rather serious, and may keep alive apprehensions for some days yet, is a most unlucky thing for me, while it is of great advantage to you. A wounded man cannot excite one-half the interest he otherwise might, when there is a chance that others may be slain every minute. Then the character of a defender is a great deal; and being a generous rival, as I have always told you, Corny, my advice is, to make the most of it. I conceal nothing, and intend to do all I can with my wound.

Yet, Bulstrode fails to capitalize on his battle wound because he was injured not from the act of the safeguarding of the Mordaunt land but from his military duties as a British officer whereas Corny undoubtedly takes full advantage of the crisis and simultaneously wins at both battlefields. By defeating the invading Indians on the Mordaunt land, Corny demonstrates his worthiness over Bulstrode, thereby establishing his claim upon Anneke and upon the land for his family estate. His confederation with the Mordaunt family through the marriage brings about the Littlepage-Mordaunt dynasty and joins the two families' properties, which later have to be settled and fought for by

the successive Littlepage generations.

In The Chainbearer, Mordy's narrative revolves around the family estate, where the young narrator has to accomplish his obligations to ensure the continuation of the Littlepage-Mordaunt dynasty. As the only surviving son of Corny and Anneke, Mordy has the responsibility of managing the two extensive family patents, Mooseridge and Ravensnest and must find the right woman to form his own family. His mission to discover his proper mate has to be accomplished jointly with the execution of his other obligation-- the retaining of the family land.

At the beginning of the story, Mordy's decision to travel to Ravensnest to conduct the business is prompted by his sense of duty, as well as his discomfort under the family pressure-- especially from his grandmother-- urging him to marry Priscilla Bayard, whose manner strikes him as both insincere and dominating. But once he sets out for work on the land patents, the ideal romance finds its path to Mordy naturally. Only while performing his duty of settling the family land does Mordy have the occasion to meet the right woman, who in this case turns out to be Dus Malbone, the niece of his long-time friend, the Chainbearer. Both Dus and her uncle are central characters in the novel; their roles are extremely essential in helping the author deliver his political statements as well as develop Mordy's narrative. While Anneke Mordaunt helps Corny to mature

socially in Satanstoe, Dus Malbone acts as Mordy's companion, especially at the time of difficulty. She stands behind the young narrator not as a delicate object that seeks protection but as a source of courage and support. In fact, their first meeting, which is symbolically dramatized in Mordy's visit to the family estates, serves to define their relationship.

The settlers of Ravensnest are completing the church building, with both Chainbearer and Mordy aiding in the difficult and dangeous work of putting the roof into position. At the moment when it appears that the roof will collapse upon the builders, a young woman runs out the crowd to "place the prop precisely where it was wanted," averting the falling of the roofbeam (C, 298). This kind of practical support projects Dus as "the loveliest being of her sex my eyes (Mordy's) had ever lighted on"(C, 298), and hence prompts Mordy's pursuit of his "rare creature."

Again, the possession of the right woman has to be achieved with the rightful possession of the land. To win the hand of Dus, Mordy must prove his worthiness in the process of defending the family land. So after Dus's initial rejection of Mordy's suit, Cooper arranges for Mordy to investigate a hidden sawmill which is being illegally operated on Littlepage land. This investigation is the thematic center of The Chainbearer, as the author utilizes the example of the squatter to elaborate on his anti-rent

arguments; while for Mordy, it is an opportunity to establish his claims on his rightful land as well as on his proper woman.

In the sawmill incident, Chainbearer and his niece assume very important roles in actualizing the young narrator's moral principles. Being a chainbearer whose job is to determine the exact property rights of the society, Andries shares much of the gentry's moral beliefs and carries out his work dutifully. After Mordy becomes a captive in the Vermont squatter's illegal operation on the Littlepage land patent, Cooper arranges to have Chainbearer captured too so that he can debate the issue of property rights with Thousandacres and spell out the absurdities of Anti-Rentism. The debate between Chainbearer and Thousandacres is a summary of irreconcilable attitudes toward property rights. When Thousandacres insists that possession of land depends only upon being first to claim it by working it, Chainbearer refutes the squatter by simply pointing out that Mordy's father and grandfathers had actually visited the Littlepage and Mordaunt patents thirty years earlier and had claimed and surveyed the land since then. Obviously, Thousandacres' arguments sound silly and ignorant, but Cooper footnoted his caution that the reader should take them seriously because the doctrines behind the squatter's debate "are constantly published in journals devoted to anti-rentism in the State of New York, and men

have acted on these principles even to the shedding of blood"(C, 387).

While Mordy and Chainbearer are in captivity, Dus remains on the periphery of this dangerous scene and acts in her own capacity to support their fight. To insure the safety of her uncle and Mordy, she sends a note to Thousandacres's son, Zephaniah, warning him of the serious consequences of the conduct and urging him to bring the conflict to a peaceful solution. When later she herself is taken captive, she stands firmly with Mordy and her uncle and fearlessly condemns the squatter's illegal actions. With the help of Chainbearer and Dus, Mordy, upon defeating the squatter and accomplishing his mission of keeping the family property intact, proves himself and thereby deserves the affection and commitment of a girl like Dus Malbone.

The sawmill dispute between Chainbearer and Thousandacres is representative of the larger, underlying social antagonism between aristocractic families and leveling democrats; it forecasts the open physical and legal conflict between the landowners and the tenants that broke out in 1840s in Cooper's home state of New York. The Redskins, the final novel in the trilogy, brings the reader to the mid 1840's and deals directly with the Anti-Rent controversy by tracing the third and fourth generations of the Littlepage family. Hugh Roger, called Uncle Ro, is the second son of Mordy and Dus; and Ro's nephew, Hugh, is the

only son of Mordy's deceased first son, Malbone. Hugh narrates the story which places the Littlepage family lands at the center of a conflict between the high principles of the refined upper-class landlords and the materialistic values of the tenants.

Following the similar narrative patterns of the two preceding Littlepage novels, Huge and Uncle Ro, the two main characters of The Redskins, are brought onto the family estate, where they assume the responsibility of defending their property rights against the intruding mob of tenants, and finally Huge realizes his love. The fundamental issue, once again, is the key questions Cooper saw as vital to America's democracy: can a society survive if fallible and selfish men are given the liberty to violate the property rights on which all civilization is based? In the name of democracy and justice, should every man be allowed to possess whatever land he wants or needs?

To address these questions, Cooper sends Hugh and his uncle on a journey through the Ravensnest estate to investigate what goes wrong and causes so many passionate men to manipulate the democratic system to their own advantage. Travelling in the disguise of a watch peddler and an organ grinder to keep their return a secret, Hugh and his uncle encounter various people along the way and find out the two sources that are threatening the estate. On the one hand, there are the Ravensnest tenants led by the demagogic

lawyer named Seneca Newcome; on the other there are the Albany politicians, who depend on the tenants for votes. The tenants are petitioning for a removal of the rents and a chance to buy the property at their own low prices, and the politicians, to please their prospective voters, have already raised the taxes on the estate. To speed up the process the tenants have resorted to terrorizing the landlord with tar buckets, rifles, and calico hoods. To mask their greed for land, they claim that their activities are performed in the name of liberty, equality, and justice.

Such is the actual situation that Hugh and his uncle face upon their disguised return to Ravensnest. In defending his estate against the anti-rent "Injins" who undoubtedly have taken up Thousandacres' cry that every man should be allowed to possess whatever land he wants or needs, Hugh hears himself slandered by demagogues at mass meetings; one of his barns is burned at night and his house itself is set afire, all because he insists on not selling his farms to the tenants on their terms and refuses to yield his principles to the rule of the majority. Even his property in church-- a canopied pew-- is destroyed because it offends the people's democratic sensibilities.

For Cooper, all these unlawful activities are directly attributable to the defiance of property rights. Since both Christian belief and civil law recognize the right of a man to his own possessions, every member of a democratic

society, whether he falls into a majority or a minority, must act in accordance with this fundamental principle. All such conflicts as that between landlords and tenants, Cooper asserted, should be referred to and judged by this principle. To decide the issue in any other way is merely to give the advantage to numbers-- and the majority are more often wrong in their opinion and action than otherwise.

To oppose the Anti-Renters' view, Cooper introduces several ordinary folks as representives of the minority who are not afraid to hold on to truth and to stand up for principle. At a mass meeting presided over by ministers of the left-wing churches, for example, Cooper has the anti-rent, rabble-rousing speech refuted by a "plain man" by the name of Hall. Hall is a mechanic, a laboring man who "had no interest that could be separated from the general good of society," but unlike the majority of the audience there, he is seen as a man of reason and principle when he speaks sensibly about the landowner's property rights and about the falsehoods presented in the speech (R, 597). The individual right to the possession of property, Hall proclaims, is sanctioned by both democratic principles and divine authority and must never be violated under any condition. So he himself can not share the spirit of "the great movement in progress" because "I hope I am not yet so great a knave as to wish to rob a neighbor because he happens to be richer than I am myself"(R, 597).

Yet, the truth stated by mechanic Hall, as Cooper tells us, is suppressed by a popular sentiment of selfishness and cupidity; therefore the dispute between landowners and tenants could not be fairly referred to and judged by principles under "the astounding circumstances of the time."[5] For Cooper, Jacksonian Democracy would work if America were a nation of such citizens as Chainbearer and mechanic Hall, who are basically honest, hardworking and, most of all, respect the sacredness of others' property rights. In reality, however, America also consisted of men like Thousandacres and Newcome, who, under the guise of justice and democracy, would tear down the American Republic and its noble principles in order to satisfy their personal greed.

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[5]In Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region, Ellis records that both landowners and tenants fought on the political stage of New York State. The Anti-Rent victories at the polls caused an immediate change in attitude on the part of the legislature. In 1846, the year when The Redskins was published, the state legislature passed the law to abolish distress for rent, to prohibit any more long-term leases, and to tax the income which the landowners received from their rents. Anti-Rent prisoners in the state prisons were pardoned by the new Governor, John Young, who was elected with the support of the Anti-Rent State Convention. See 268-312.In his preface to The Redskins, Cooper condemns as illegal the political legislation favoring the anti-renters. The attempts to break the landowners's legal leases he attributes to "barefaced frauds" and "palpable cupidity and covetousness," if yielded to, will demand more and more concessions at the cost of the democratic principles(R, 461-465).

CHAPTER IV

Satanstoe and The Chainbearer:

Cooper's Historiography and Social Types

In his discussion of "historical consciousness" in literature Georg Lukacs argues that the historical novel transforms our notion of character by replacing moral individuality, or personality, with a more historical and deterministic notion of type and typicality. The greatness of a writer, Lukacs asserts, lies in his ability to individualize his historical heroes in such a way that certain individual traits quite peculiar to them are brought into a very complex and vital relationship with the age in which they live, as well as with the movement which they represent and endeavour to lead to victory.[1] As a historian and novelist, Cooper placed many of the plots and protagonists of his fiction in specific settings of American history-- the history of the American Revolution and the history of land settlement and frontier life in upper New York State.[2] While the Leatherstocking Tales are "set at the

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[1]See Lukacs' The Historical Novel, 47.

[2] Such novels as The Spy, The Pilot and Lionel Lincoln deal with the history of American Revolution, and the five Leatherstocking Tales and the Littlepage trilogy cover much

landing of white America," and "the primal quarrel of American history is the ever-shifting battle between white settlers and Indians over the white claims to the land that they found already peopled by the Indians," the historical consciousness of the Littlepage trilogy is set in the political and economic changes operating throughout the Jacksonian America and centers on the specific antagonism between the different social types of the whites who all claimed their rights to the American lands.[3]

In his study of the American historical imagination Harry Henderson points out that in Cooper's work there is a fundamental tension between an awareness of historical process and a vision of cultural wholeness.[4] This vision of cultural wholeness, as portrayed in Cooper's fiction, is an ideal of social life realized in the customs and manners of a community or group, namely that of the American landed gentry. Cooper hoped that historical process would work to fulfill rather than destroy this ideal. Fighting the adverse current of American cultural changes, the tenants' revolt in the Anti-Rent War in particular, Cooper used the model of the Littlepage heroes to confront the process of political

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the same portions of the nation's history of land settlement and frontier life.

[3]Philip Fisher, Hard Facts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 53.

[4]Harry B. Henderson, Versions of the Past (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 88.

and economic change and sought a principle of order which could circumscribe the change and make it compatible with the utopian image of a higher civilization he so much wished to see established in American life. It is the development of this concept that gives form and meaning to the Littlepage novels.

In stating the purpose of the trilogy, Cooper declares in the preface to Satanstoe:

> We conceive no apology is necessary for treating the subject of anti-rentism with the utmost frankness. Agreeably to our views of the matter, 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 boldly advanced in connection with this subject(S, 243).

Guided by this master purpose, Cooper presents his theme in the form of the historical novel and unfolds the Littlepage stories in a way to enable the reader to reexperience the social and human motives which lead his characters to think, feel and act as they would have in historical reality.[5]

Since the action of the three novels ranges over a period of some ninety years, from the French War of 1757 up to the Anti-Rent struggle of late 1840s-- a period that saw a number of fundamental changes in American life-- Cooper had to impose a sense of unity on the series. The most

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[5]In The Historical Novel, Lukacs writes: "The historical novel therefore has to demonstrate by artistic means that historical circumstances and characters existed in precisely such and such a way." 43.

obvious devices he used, of course, are easily noted. Both the land itself-- starting from the family manor, Ravensnest in Satanstoe and developing in The Chainbearer and The Redskins-- and the presence of the successive Littlepage narrators provide a sense of the relatedness of the events and give notion of continuity to the novels.

Unified as they are, the three novels yet display such striking differences that many critics tend to view the first, Satanstoe, as one of Cooper's best novels, and the last, The Redskins, as one of his worst. This critical evaluation is often based on a contention that Satanstoe is an accurate description of the mid-eighteenth century life among the landed gentry and has no real bearing on the Anti-Rent question, whereas The Redskins is merely a wordy exercise in polemics and thereby diminishes Cooper's artistic integrity.[6]

In a purely artistic sense, this critical view may be valid. Yet, the trilogy, unified as a concentrated and heightened reflection of the important features of objective

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[6]Thomas Lounsbury, for example, sees The Redskins as illustrating "everything that was disagreeable in Cooper's manner and bungling in his art," whereas he praises Satanstoe as "the very best of Cooper's stories," arguing that it has suffered in reputation simply through its association with The Redskins: "In no sense is Satanstoe, in particular, a political novel. There is no reference to anti-rentism in it save in the preface." James Fenimore Cooper, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882), 252-253. And the historian of American fiction, Arthur Quinn, also expresses the similar view. See his American Fiction (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), 65.

reality, are derived from Cooper's subjective mode of expression of popular life and, therefore, can not be treated artistically apart, in isolation from the ideological and political problems with which he had to contend at the time. For, in the historical novel, the ideological and political concerns, as Lukacs sees, play a decisive role, and what appear to be purely formal, compositional problems such as selection and presentation of historical material usually demonstrate the author's ideological and political thoughts and problems.[7]

In composing the Littlepage trilogy Cooper, like every other historical novelist, was faced with a conflict between his subjective intentions and the honesty and ability with which he is able to reproduce the objective reality of history.[8] In this chapter I will focus on the first two volumes of the trilogy and examine how Cooper approached this conflict in the trilogy and managed to achieve his political objective by carefully screening and defining what he saw as the essentials, the richness and the social

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[7]Lukacs also says that "Indeed, the whole question of whether the historical novel is a genre in its own right, with its own artistic laws or whether it obeys essentially the same laws as the novel in general can only be solved on the basis on a general approach to the decisive ideological and political problems." The Historical Novel, 332.

[8]The greatness of a historical writer, according to Lukacs, will depend upon his or her chosen priority in this conflict. "The more, and the more easily, his subjective intentions prevail, the weaker, poorer and thinner will be his work." The Historical Novel, 244.

variety of popular life in the development of American history.

I

Cooper's Historiography

At the beginning of the preface to Satanstoe, Cooper writes:

> Every chronicle of manners has a certain value. When customs are connected with principles, in their origin, development, or end, such records have a double importance; and it is because we think we see such a connection between the facts and incidents of the Littlepage Manuscripts, and certain important theories of our own time, that we give the former to the world(S, 243).

For Cooper, an account of the customs and manners in the past could uncover the essentials of historical process and therefore was an effective means for addressing the important issues of the present time. With this in mind, Cooper planned the Littlepage trilogy as follows:

> We had been led to lay these manuscripts before the world, partly by considerations of the above nature, and partly on account of the manner in which the two works we have named, "Satanstoe" and the "Chainbearer," relate directly to the great New York question of the day, ANTI-RENTISM; which question will be found to be pretty fully laid bare, in the third and last book of the series(S, 243).

Thus related in form, the three novels are presented as personal memoirs by members of three successive generations of the Littlepage family.

Each of these three books has its own hero, its

> own heroine, and its own picture of manners, complete; though the latter may be, and is, more or less thrown into relief by its pendants(S, 243).

Cooper's strategy here is quite obvious: he will address the Anti-Rent question by describing three successive systems of manners, and contrast the three social scenes so as to bring out the origins and development of present behavior.

In assuming his role as historian, Cooper offers the Littlepage memoirs as a series of authentic documents. But because the social scenes he intended to cover in his first two volumes are dated far back to the time before his birth, he was faced with the difficult but common problem of how to establish his credibility on his claim that the trilogy were the stories of true accounts of popular life in history. The method with which he approached this problem here seems somewhat different from that he employed in his other historical novels.[9] Although Cooper knew he needed to draw on the known historical records, as he had done in his previous novels, in order to recreate the social scenes, he also knew that his political objective for which the trilogy were written was more urgent, and its achievement demanded a more subjective mode of treating the historical material, or in his own phrase, a mode of "the utmost frankness." In

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[9]In his historical novels concerning the American Revolution, the frontier settlement and the sea adventure such as The Spy, Lionel Lincoln, the Leatherstocking Tales, The Pilot, The Red Rover, etc., Cooper based the stories on the familiar historical scenes and drew on the known historical records.

justifying his view of historiography, Cooper has his narrator, Corny, echo the point at the beginning of Satanstoe.

> It is easy to foresee that this country is destined to undergo great and rapid changes. Those that more properly belong to history, history will doubtless attempt to record, and probably with the questionable veracity and prejudice that are apt to influence the labors of that particular muse; but there is little hope that any traces of American society, in its more familiar aspects, will be preserved among us, through any of the agencies usually employed for such purposes(S, 244).

History here is viewed in a tone of irony; Cooper then has Corny tell us that despite all the ironic notions of history he will proceed with his effort to "preserve some vestiges of household life in New York," confident that "a faithful picture of only a single important scene in the events of a single life is doing something toward painting the great historical piece of his day"(S, 244).

In a way, the narrator's opening remarks have helped Cooper to dilute the suspicion the reader may have of him and won him some sympathy for the difficulties he had to overcome in writing such stories. The narrator's mild despair over the insufficiency of records of popular life becomes also a justification for the author's efforts to provide a remedy. For in the absence of authentic records, it becomes at least understandable that the historian of manners may legitimately simulate them. In this regard, Cooper again has his narrator defend his narrative

undertaking:

> It may be well to say here, however, I shall not attempt the historical mood at all, but content myself with giving the feelings, incidents, and interests of what is purely private life, connecting them no farther with things that are of a more general nature than is indispensable to render the narrative intelligible and accurate(S, 245).

Here, Cooper is trying to remove himself from the limitations of pure history so that he can have the liberty to address the issues at hand with the help of the historical circumstances. In this respect, Cooper shared his sense of historical necessity with Scott.[10] While it is true that both authors made extensive use of the figures and events of public history, it is also true that historical materials were used just for their circumstantial necessity and appeared only in the background of their narratives.[11]

To see this in Cooper's case, one need only recall the way in which the historical figure, George Washington, is presented in The Spy. In the book the commander-in-chief of the American army has to be there, mostly, to confirm the historical scene; and therefore his shadowy presence appears

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[10]Lukacs says that "in Scott's portrayal, historical necessity is always a resultant, never a presupposition; it is the tragic atmosphere of a period and not the object of the writer's reflections." The Historical Novel, 58.

[11]In this regard, Scott once said: "...it has always seemed to me...that where historical characters are introduced it ought only to be incidently and in such a manner as not to interfere with established truth." The Letters of Sir Walter Scott, ed. H. J. C. Grierson (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1932), 3:234.

only briefly under the disguise of an assumed name, Mr. Harper.[12] The use of public history in this fashion is apparently intended to minimize the necessity to conform to well known facts about the past. By focusing his narrative attention on what Corny calls "matters much too personal and private," Cooper was trying to retain the sense of authenticity for his Littlepage memoirs and in the meantime, to avoid potentially embarrassing competition with formal histories relying on documented evidence.

In presenting the true memoirs of private affairs of private persons, "authenticity of local colure," as Lukacs calls it, Cooper could minimize but never dispense with the broad base of historical evidence. Throughout the trilogy there are substantial indications that Cooper's treatment of the past, to a certain extent, corresponds to the public events and figures of documented history. In Satanstoe, for example, Corny describes the British operations against Fort Ticonderoga in the summer of 1758, in which the British were badly defeated by the joint force of French and Indians. For the actual descriptions, Cooper, through the participation

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[12]In developing his themes derived from the realities of the American experience, Cooper once had an ambitious plan for a group of historical novels to be called "Legends of the Thirteen Republics," of which Lionel Lincoln was to be the first. For this book, Cooper did extensive research and based the story on the descriptions of the retreat from Concord and of the Battle of Bunker Hill. Due to its unfavorable reception, Lionel Lincoln remains the only volume of this projected series which Cooper soon abandoned. See Donald Ringe's James Fenimore Cooper(New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), 41-42.

of his narrator in the battle, provides the reader with a great deal of information about the event. Such details as the strength and names of the British troops involoved, the transportation means they employed to cross Lake Champlain, and the actual number of casualties either side suffered can all be traced directly to Abiel Holmes' The Annals of America, in which the historian records at great length this military event.[13]

There is little doubt that Cooper must have conducted his research into Holmes' account of the Ticonderoga Campaign before deciding to insert the event into Satanstoe.[14] In his effort to find materials that would establish accurately a historical base of the period in the trilogy, Cooper also made extensive use of the published sources he had access to at the time. One book he drew on heavily is Mrs. Anne Grant's Memoirs of an American Lady. In this connection, one scholar has determined that all but nine of the thirty chapters of Satanstoe are set in scenes or contain events that are traceable to Grant's work.[15]

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[13]Cf. Abiel Holmes' American Annals, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: W. Hilliard, 1805), 2:228-230, with Satanstoe, chaps. XXII, XXIII.

[14]Cooper acknowledges Molmes' book in one of his footnotes in which he pretends to resolve a discrepancy between Corny's account and Holmes' by referring to a third source. Satanstoe, 425.

[15]Dorothy Dondore, "The Debt of Two Dyed-in-the-Wool Americans to Mrs. Grant's Memoirs: Cooper's Satanstoe and Paulding's The Dutchman's Fireside," American Literature 12 (1940):52-58.

Grant's Memoirs of an American Lady, first published in 1808 and subtitled "With Sketches of Manners and Scenes in America as They Existed Previous to the Revolution," is claimed as "an authentic record of facts,-- a record which was much admired by Francis Jeffrey, Washington Irving, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Southey, William M. Thackeray, and other great heirs of fame."[16] The book's popularity in America is attested by the fact that it went through several editions in the nineteenth century, and definitely caught the attention of many men of letters at the time.

As a man who read extensively, Cooper undoubtedly was familiar with Memoirs. In fact, he made no attempt to conceal his knowledge of Mrs. Grant's work and openly acknowledges his debt to her by citing her book more than once in Satanstoe(341, 425). Most of the material Cooper borrowed from Memoirs is taken from the first half of the work in which Mrs. Grant depicts the customs and manners of Albany during the period of her stay there. The extent of Cooper's actual borrowings has been provided by Dorothy

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[16]Mrs. Anne Grant, Memoirs of an American Lady, ed. James Grant Wilson (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1901), IX. Some historians and novelists borrowed extensively from this book. For instance, William Dunlap, in his History of the New Netherlands (New York: B. Franklin, 1970), quotes frequently from The Memoirs. Also, in his preface to The Dutchman's Fireside, James Kirk Paulding acknowledges his gratitude to Mrs. Grant for providing the conception upon which his tale is based and calls her work "one of the finest sketches of early American manners ever drawn." See The Dutchman's Fireside (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1839), III.

Dondore, who gives a convenient list of twelve major episodic parallels between the two works; but even this comprehensive list cannot possibly include everything Cooper, in composing Satanstoe and other novels, actually owes to Memoirs. However, Miss Dondore's study does provide solid evidence that Cooper made extensive use of published sources available to him in order to insure accuracy for his own recreation of popular life.

In addition to the documented sources, Cooper was also conscious of utilizing his own personal life and experiences to furnish details of popular life in his fiction. For instance, in dramatizing cultural differences between the English and the Dutch of the colonial New York, he used his personal observations as well as secondary sources to supply details regarding their respective social manners and life styles. There is also evidence that his marriage into the De Lancey family, the prominent landed gentry of Westchester, gave Cooper special access to details of past manners. In fact, his narrators mention the De Lanceys several times in the trilogy and at one point in Satanstoe, an actual letter from his wife's great-grandfather, Colonel Caleb Heathcote, is cited to corroborate Corny's account.[17]

In discussing how Cooper, in composing the Littlepage narratives, treated his sources, both personal and

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[17]Satanstoe, 252-253. The complete letter is quoted in Dixon Ryan Fox's biography, Caleb Heathcote: Gentleman Colonist(New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1971), 202.

secondary, it is essential to be aware of the fact that his criterion of faithfulness to the truth of history was regulated by what he saw as important and relevant to the the real issues of the time. In this regard, Francis Parkman once gave the following caution:

> Faithfulness to the truth of history involves far more than a research, however patient and scrupulous, into special facts. Such facts may be detailed with the most minute exactness, and yet the narrative, taken as a whole, may be unmeaning and untrue. The narrator must seek to imbue himself with the life and spirit of the time. He must study events in their bearings near and remote; in the character, habits, and manners of those who took part in them. He must himself be, as it were, a sharer or a spectator of the action he described.[18]

Undoubtedly, Cooper shared Parkman's view. By creating a contemporary spectator and participant in his Littlepage narrators, he solved the problem of how to imbue historical facts with "the life and spirit of the time," and thereby could treat the subject of Anti-Rentism with "utmost frankness" and "no apology."

In presenting his theme in the trilogy, Cooper carefully screened the historical facts, selecting only those suitable for his intended social scenes in each volume. In describing the colonial Albany scene in Satanstoe, for example, Cooper obviously prefers the colorful and the comforting over the drab and the

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[18]Francis Parkman, see his introduction to Pioneers of France in the New World in Works of Parkman, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1897), 1: page, c.

unpleasant, and deliberately suppresses Mrs. Grant's references to matters which adversely affected the scenery of the city like poverty, small-pox, drunken Indians, abused slaves, etc. This practice of suppressing the unpleasant evidence serves Cooper's political theme and enables him to trace the deterioration of society through a sharp contrast between the harmonious past and the chaotic present.

The strategy of past harmony versus present disorder is used most noticeably through the ways people relate to one another in the different social scenes in the trilogy. In the first two volumes, especially in Satanstoe, the sense of human harmony is deliberately stressed in all aspects of New York life.[19] For instance, there is little conflict or tension in a place even as big as New York City, according to Corny's account; and people of various classes, from all walks of life, all seem to get along peacefully. Unbelievably, the friendship is felt even between the British regulars and the colonials.[20]

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[19]Contrary to Cooper's description, contemporary historians insist that the social atemosphere of New York life in that period was anything but harmonious. In fact, that period of time is seen as "the age of reform" rather than of harmony. See History of the State of New York, Vol. 6.

[20]William Dunlap describes the British military presence there was viewed by the citizens as "a general abhorrence of the oppressor." See History of the New Netherlands, 1:383. General Lord Loudoun, Commander in Chief of the British armies in America, once demanded that his troops be quartered free in local homes, but the request was vigorously protested by the colonials led actually by Cooper's ancestor by marriage, Lieutenant Governor DeLancey.

This sense of harmony is also extended to the relationship between white masters and negro slaves, despite the fact that Cooper, from both his own experience and his familiarity with Mrs. Grant's account, would surely have had some idea of how slaves were actually treated.[21] In the scene of the so-called Pinkster festival portrayed by Corny, the slaves are indulged by their masters and treated as "part of a common family." This kind treatment is transformed, on the slaves' part, into their respect for and loyalty to the whites. When Anneke, the heroine of Satanstoe, comes to watch the Pinkster festival, "her presence immediately produced an impression; even the native Africans moderating their manner, and lowing their yells, as it might be the better to suit her more refined tastes"(S, 280). So as crises arise-- Littlepage heroes being threatened by the attacks of the hostile Hurons, the squatters and the Anti-Renters, the black servant represented here by Jaap never fails to come to the aid of his masters.

A compromise was eventually arranged, but the mutual relationship remained tense. See Stanley Pargellis, Chapter VII, "Quartering," Lord Loudoun in North America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), 187-210. Cooper would surely have had some knowledge of this fact but apparently he chose to ignore it here.

[21]In his study of Cooper and his age, Stephen Railton points out that Cooper was emotionally isolated from several of the major crises of the time: slavery, for example, was one issue he never seriously addressed. See Fenimore Cooper: A Study of His Life and Imagination (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 10.

Cooper's emphasis on harmony is noted also by his intended absence of any substantial reference to the direct confrontations between landlords and tenants in the first two novels.[22] Although he devotes many lengthy passages to his discussion of landowners' property rights in relation to the democratic principles and portrays, in The Chainbearer, the incident of the squatter's robbery of Littlepage's land, the treatment of the relationship between landlords and tenants is minimal and lacking in any real representation of tenants. For instance, in the last section of Satanstoe when the landlords are brought to their estates, only a few tenants are briefly mentioned and they all appear as inert and docile, able to function only under the leadership of their landlords. The tenants' presence in The Chainbearer is also limited. Mostly they appear as shadowy figures and certainly do not strike the reader as having any potential for engaging in those violent actions described in The Redskins.

Cooper's treatment of the landlord-tenant relationship in the first two novels may be accounted for from at least two angles. In terms of the general structure of the trilogy, Cooper intends to demonstrate a sharp contrast

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[22]According to the historians, the agrarian disputes between landlords and tenants had long existed before the Anti-Rent War that broke out in the 1840s. See Ellis' Landlords and Farmer in the Hudson-Mohawk Region 1790-1850 and Christman's Tin Horns and Calico. Also see my second chapter.

between the harmonious past and the chaotic present. To do so, he scrupulously suppresses any evidence of open confrontation between classes in the early parts of his "history." Thus, the agrarian disturbance seen in Satanstoe is attributed to the hostile Indians and is treated as an inevitable element of land settlement. In The Chainbearer, where Anti-Rent issues are implied prominently, the conflict is underplayed by making the major antagonists both members of the lower class. Representing the type of restraint that makes a stable society possible, the Chainbearer is cast as the chief opponent to the lawless squatter, Thousandacres, who is the apostle of unrestrained democracy. In a sense, this opposition produces an impression that the masses at the time had still respected and sanctioned the landlord's rights and position, and the intrusion upon one's private property, as something commonly condemned, had been merely an underground business. It is only in The Redskins that open class conflict becomes an element in Cooper's narrative scheme, where the class harmony of the colonial period is replaced by the class struggle in the 1840s.

The fact that the tenants in Satanstoe and The Chainbearer are peacefully docile and shadowy may also be explained in terms of Cooper's polemic strategy in the trilogy. Cooper defends the landlord by tracing the origins and development of his property rights, and this defense is based on his belief that the landed gentry is a social group

of superior worth, talent and enterprise. America's democracy he wishes should best "avail of the talents of the gifted few, while the long train of humbler beings shall have scope and leisure also for the privileges of their mortality."[23] Thus he repeatedly emphasizes in the trilogy that the Littlepage family estates are settled at great cost and trouble to the landlord while the immediate beneficiaries are none other than the tenants themselves who must be lured to the wild land with extremely favorable lease arrangements, kept there with constant concessions, and protected from hostile Indians.

In Satanstoe's episodes of Indian hostilities, Cooper dramatizes the landlord's vigorous heroics in contrast to the tenants' passivity and helplessness. In The Chainbearer, he stresses the landlord's sacrifice through the generous terms of lease renewals Mordaunt Littlepage offers to his tenants, but deliberately ignores the tenants' enterprise and hardships. Despite his claim in the preface to The Redskins that the trilogy contains "a fair account of the comparative sacrifices of time, money, and labor, made respectively by the landlord and the tenants, on a New York estate"(R, 461), there is in effect little mention of the contributions which the tenants made to the prosperity of society; instead Cooper provides a great deal of evidence that testifies to the landlord's good deeds. History, as far

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[23]Cooper, Notions of the Americans, 1:95-96.

as Cooper was concerned, should be viewed in the light of the leading role of the landed gentlemen rather than the dependent role of the tenants.[24]

II

Cooper's Social Types

The rights of private property, Cooper argues in The American Democrat, comprise the most vital principle of all civilization. But attempt as he might to convince himself and others that he was defending this law in the abstract, it was a particular kind of property belonging to a particular social class that really concerned him. "Nothing contributes so much to the civilization of a country," says one character in the The Chainbearer, "as to dot it with a gentry." Put more specifically, one of his spokesmen says:

> I say, that in a country like this, in which land is so abundant as to render the evils of a general monopoly impossible, a landed gentry is precisely what is most needed for higher order of civilization, including manners, tastes, and the minor principles, and is the very class which, if reasonably maintained and properly regarded, would do the most good at the least risk of any social caste known(R, 681).

Cooper's objective in the trilogy is to defend the property rights of this "most needed" class, and he did so by defining the worthiness of their traits, or social

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[24]Cooper's ideal model was an agrarian society governed according to high principles by a class of landed gentlemen. See Cady's The Gentleman in America, 103-145.

distinctions, in contrast to those of other social groups. Viewed in this sense, the Littlepage trilogy, to borrow Jameson's term, is starkly "class-conscious" and may be seen as Cooper's own socially symbolic expression of class-feeling at a high pitch.

To demonstrate the worthiness of the class which he believed specially qualified to assume the leading role in society, Cooper invites the reader to behold the fine social distinctions, or, in his own term, social station, in the Littlepages and members of their circle.[25] To begin with, let us consider his two narrators, Corny and Mordy Littlepage in the first two volumes of the trilogy. Gifted young men of a landed family perfectly suited by its social status-- above the yeomanry, below the aristocracy-- to produce the proper leaders for Cooper's ideal democratic society, both Corny and Mordy are home-grown in a Otsego Hall-like family and community environment. Inspired with sensible, moderate religious beliefs-- the Littlepages are initially Anglicans and later Episcopalians-- both Corny and Mordy have been raised at home to possess the morals and

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[25]Cooper regraded the landed gentry as the leading class of the American democratic polity. He once said metaphorically: "If the head is necessary to direct the body, so is the head of society." See Cady's The Gentleman in America, 110. In terms of social distinctions which he termed as social station, he explained: "Social station is that which one possesses in the ordinary associations, and is dependent on birth, education, personal qualities, property, tastes, habits, and, in some instances, on caprice, or fashion." The American Democrat, 92-93.

manners of gentlemen. They complete their education at Princeton-- Nassau Hall in Corny's time-- and thus are able to think and act intelligently.

In supplying the economic background for the Littlepage heroes, Cooper at the same time incorporates aspects of his ideal America. Its economic foundation is to be primarily agrarian; its political life is to be shaped by members of an aristocracy of merit, not of birth, with ties to the land, not to the commercial interests. In this type of economy Cooper envisions a garden-like society made up mostly of farmers who look to an educated, principled and disinterested gentry for enlightenment and leadership. With this agrarian economy as its base, society then can progress, as Cooper wishes, at a moderate pace of order, harmony and security.

As leaders of this idyllic world, the landed gentry are men of principles and integrity. In contrast to the various social types that do not belong to Cooper's ideal nation, both Corny and Mordy are honest, upright, and totally committed to their principles.[26] Besides, they also have the courage of their convictions. Having demonstrated in childhood his mettle by overcoming a bully for Anneke's

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[26]In stating their political and religious views, and in relating to people, especially to their tenants, both protagonists are portrayed as honest, frank and faithful to their beliefs. See Cooper's descriptions of how Corny treats Majore Bulstrode and Jason Newcome and of how Mordy deals with his tenants and Thousandacres in Satanstoe and The Chainberer.

sake, Corny goes on in manhood to prove his courage against a wild animal, nature's wildness, and hostile Indians. Mordy too stands competently in tests of courage. Recalling his past at the beginning of The Chainbearer, he tells us that at the age of fifteen he left college to join his grandfather and father in the war of Revolution and served in a number of actual battles. While on his mission to inspect the family estate, he falls into the hands of the squatter's family. In fighting against the lawless timberman, he bravely endures his captivity and successfully retains his family land.

Aspects of Cooper's model gentry are also embodied in the women they choose to marry, as personified by Anneke Mordaunt and Dus Malbone. Raised at Lilacsbush in circumstances similar to Corny's and possessing similar morals and manners, Anneke is precisely the woman for Corny. Although her father prefers that she marry the young, titled British officer, she decides to choose Corny, a promising son of America, for her mate.

For all her blushing delicacy and strait-laced propriety, Anneke is a strong-willed colonial girl and represents part of the emerging gentry class of new American nation.[27] In a way, the rivalry for Anneke's hand between

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[27]In Cooper's Americans, Kay House points out that all Cooper's better heroines are self-reliant and can respond to and are created from the action of adventure tales. 39-43. In the episodes of the Indian attack, Anneke is projected as a woman of determination and courage.

Corny and Bulstrode signifies the larger struggle for nationhood which is developing in the background of Satanstoe. As the story opens, the British rule the colonies with the help of the colonial leading class of Anglophile gentry such as Anneke's father. But as the novel progresses, there is a gradual shifting of power from the hands of the British and their Anglophile colonials into the hands of the emerging American gentry. The fact that the British military action on Fort Ticonderogo ends up in their own defeat is a clear indication of the redcoats' inability to win in the unfamiliar territory of the American wilderness. Contrary to the British defeat on Fort Ticonderogo, the Americans, thoroughly understanding the nature of warfare in the American wilderness, are victorious in defending the land at Ravensnest. While Corny takes the lead to fight against hostile Indians on Mordaunt's premises, Bulstrode, the only representative of the British on the scene, is incapacitated, and thus unable to offer any assistance in the time of crisis.

If Anneke is a good Littlepage heroine, Dus, when analyzed in view of her predicament, is a better one. Finding herself in the averse circumstances that have compelled her to pursuits not normally those of a lady, Dus, though of a genteel breeding and education, is described as being "half wild." But this "wildness" does not diminish her femininity and high morality as shown, most noticeably, in

her devotion to her uncle, Chainbearer, for whom she has carried the chain during the strenuous surveys of the forests surrounding Ravensnest. Rather, the crudeness and challenges of the frontier consolidate her femininity, making her appear as a stronger and lovelier heroine in the story.

Mordy's first encounter with Dus in The Chainbearer holds Cooper's tone of the loveliness noted in his American frontier heroines living in the nation's growing years. Hidden from Mordy in the woods and heard mysteriously in the distance, Dus sings, like a sweet nightingale, Indian words set to the Scotch musical tone. Her voice "that gave birth to such delicious harmony" strikes Mordy "as the fullest, richest, and most plaintive he had ever heard"(C, 277). When she appears physically, Dus looks like an angel, at least to Mordy, distinctively clothed in her own style.

> Ursula had neither preserved in her dress the style of one of her sex and condition in the world, nor yet entirely adopted that common to girls of the class to which she now seemingly belonged. It struck me that some of those former garments that were the simplest in fashion, and the most appropriate in material, had been especially arranged for present use; and sweetly becoming were they, to one her style of countenance and perfection of form(C, 308).

Dus' clothing, Mordy theorizes, derives from fine tastes that belong to the genteel class. And she "had preserved just enough of the peculiar attire of her own class to let one understand that she, in truth, belonged to it without rendering the distinction obtrusive"(C, 308). "The great

indispensables of tastes, manners, and opinions," Mordy argues, are not social trivialities but important indications of intelligence and cultivation particularized by classes in society. To deny or disrespect them brings society into a state of stupidity and meanness.

Not only does she sing and dress well, Dus also thinks and acts well, especially in time of danger and difficulty. When she rushes in among the men raising the frame of the new Congregational church and places the prop that prevents it from falling down, she proves to be a strong frontier woman whose action requires a combination of "coolness, intelligence and courage"(C, 298). To emphasize the strength of her femininity which has developed under tests of nature and circumstances, Cooper has Mordy compare Dus with the girl that Mordy's family had hoped he would marry.

> Talk of Pris Bayard in comparison with Ursula Malbone! Both had beauty, it is true, though the last was far the handsomest; both had delicacy, and sentiment, and virtue, and all that pertains to a well-educated young woman, if you will; but Dus had a character of her own, and principles, and an energy, and a decision, that made her the girl of ten thousand(C, 314).

Dus is undoubtedly one of Cooper's patterned heroines.[28] The fact that she has to live in an adverse predicament is

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[28]One of the patterns House sees in Cooper's heroines is that "a female character could enrich her life without becoming unfeminine by leaving the domestic routine of towns and going where there was action. Paradoxically, it was only when a well-educated heroine invaded what was most eminently a man's world (ships, battlefields, forests, frontier settlements) that she acquired physical presence, and complexity of character." Cooper's Americans, 39.

in effect the very source from which she gains her experience and strength that make her superior to the girls of the higher class and bring her to stand out as the perfect wife for the Littlepage.

If the Littlepage heroes and heroines represent the worthy whites who can properly lead in Cooper's envisioned idyllic society, the other social types, most noticeably the ones personified by the Dutch and the Yankee, embody the whites who have the potential either to harmonize or disrupt the society. As two social groups, both the Dutch and the Yankee have their materialistic desires when it comes to the possession of America's land. But their means and motives, according to Cooper's descriptions and analyses, are quite different. "The Dutch group have purchased title to the land; the Yankees try to take over by force, by trickery, or by using their unasked labor as the basis for a claim. The Dutch want to clear the land only enough to settle down and enjoy it peacefully; the Yankees want to convert it and its forests to cash; they want to strip it, wastefully and greedily, for present profit or speculate with it in the future."[29]

For Cooper, their differences in possessing America's

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[29]House, Cooper's Americans, 106. In many of Cooper's novels, so House sees in his book, there are "three politically effective natural groups" who represent "the three forms of moral life" in the nation's cultural and economic development. See the chapters of "the Wonterful World of the Dutch," "the Case against New England" and "the Model Gentry."

land define their respective characters and social roles, with the Dutch seen as the lovely friends of "the good life" and the Yankee as its tricky foes. As noted in Satanstoe for instance, Dirck Van Valkenburgh, Corny's friend, is a charming Dutch figure whose characteristics fit harmoniously with the idyllic background. Lack as he may in learning, Dirck is honest, simple, and gallant. In comparing him with the Connecticut schoolteacher, Jason Newcome, Cooper's narrator describes thus:

> His complexion was fair, his limbs large and well-proportioned, his hair light, his eyes blue, and his face would have been thought handsome by most persons. I will not deny, however, that there was a certain ponderosity, both of mind and body, about my friend that did not very well accord with the general notion of grace and animation. Nevertheless, Dirck was a sterling fellow, as true as steel, as brave as a game-cock, and as honest as noonday light.
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> Jason was a very different sort of person, in many essentials. In figure, he was also tall, but he was angular, loose-jointed and swingling-slouching would be the better word, perhaps. Still, he was not without strength, having worked on a farm until he was near twenty; and he was as active as a cat; a result that took the stranger a little by surprise, when he regarded only his loose, quavering sort of build. In the way of thought, Jason would think two feet to Dirck's one; but I am far from certain that it was always in so correct a direction. Give the Dutchman time, he was very apt to come out right; whereas Jason, I soon discovered, was quite liable to come to wrong conclusions, and particularly so in all matters that were a little adverse, and which affected his own apparent interest(S, 267).

The direct comparison of the Yankee with the Dutch is replayed near the end of the novel when the narrator stands in front of the grave of Guert Ten Eyck, who died a hero

defending the land. Again, the Dutch outplays the Yankee by a large moral margin. Seeing the Dutch youth as "a finer" man who "better satisfied the eye in all respects," Corny draws the comparison:

> Notwithstanding, all the books in the world could not have converted Guert Ten Eyck into a Jason Newcome, or Jason Newcome into a Guert Ten Eyck. Each owed many of his peculiarities, doubtless, to the province in which he was bred and born, and to the training consequent on these accidents; but nature had also drewn broad disinctions between them. All the wildness of Guert's impulses could not altogether destroy his feelings, tone, and tact as a gentleman; while all the soaring, extravagant pretensions of Jason never could have ended in elevating him to that character(S, 480).

In short, all their individual peculiarities may be boiled down to one thing: morality. Yankee morality is summed up by a friend and fellow soldier of Corny's grandfather as "praying and plundering; so they go on... praying and plundering; so they go on"(S, 250). In contrast, the Dutch morality, to quote an Indian guide's (Susquesus) analysis of Guert, is: "Head too young-- hand good-- heart good-- head very bad"(S, 467). The two social types are antithetical, and not surprisingly, they do not mix well. As Dirck informs Corny: "my father has a great dread of a Yankee's getting a finger into any of his bargains. He says the Yankees are the locusts of the west"(S, 296).

Frequently, these Yankee "locusts" appear in Cooper's fiction as two types of villains: the primitive and the civilized. Differently as they may manifest themselves in the public eye, they are both seen as mean-minded, selfish

materialists who are desperate to exploit American land and who have no trace of reverence for nature or social morals. The primitive type is well characterized by Aaron Thousandacres in The Chainbearer. Stern and threatening, a tribal leader like Ishmael Bush in The Prairie, Thousandacres asserts his own will as the prime force in society and takes by brute force whatever his distorted reason tells him he needs or wants. His act of invading Littlepage's land, as he reasons, is sanctioned by the spirit of liberty and democracy.

> Now I call it liberty to let every man have as much land as he has need on, and no more, keepin' the rest for them that's in the same situation. If he and his father be true fri'nds of liberty, let 'em prove it like men, by giving up all claims to any more land than they want. 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(C, 412).

To validate his theory on liberty, Thousandacres, stupid as he may appear, consciously associates his position with that of the public as he contends that his notions are also "other men's notions, I know, though they be called squatters' notions"(C, 412). In an authoritative tone of the spokesman for the public, the squatter then threatens: "Congressmen have held 'em, and will hold 'em ag'in, if they expect much support, in some parts of the country, at election time. I daresay the day will come when governors will be found to hold 'em. Governors be but men a'ter all, and must hold doctrines that satisfy men's wants, or they

won't be governors long"(C, 413).

Thousandacres' bold remarks undoubtedly bear a direct reference to the Anti-Rent War and apparently represent the essence of what bothers Cooper.[30] To criticize the squatter, Cooper uses "the upright and straightforward common sense of Chainbearer" to oppose the wickedness of the mean-minded squatter. Born of "a respectable Dutch family but thoroughly uneducated-- "illiterate almost to greatness"(C, 235)-- Chainbearer, though bearing a resemblance to Dirck and Guert in Satanstoe, is nonetheless a stronger, and also more solidly portrayed, Dutch character: principled, honest, and brave. Having in his earlier life been "cheated out of his substance by a Yankee"(C, 232), he makes his living as a surveyor and has "an unrivalled reputation" in the trade. Like Mordy Littlepage, he has held a commission in the service, but his natural humility does not allow him to consider himself Mordy's equal. The chains he constantly bears in effect symbolize both the self-imposed restraints by which he leads his life and the measurements through which society seeks to designate each man's proper place.

In Cooper's hopeful view of America, Chainbearer embodies the ideal of the working-class men on whose shoulders rests the social harmony and tranquillity; whereas

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[30]Directly responding to Thousandacres, Cooper comes up with two footnotes as editor. In one footnote, the editor criticizes the squatter's remarks for the violation of the Tenth Commandment; in the other he ridicules the squatter's tone. See C, 412-413.

Thousandacres represents unlettered, rapacious villians whose axes and rope plunder America not only of its trees but also of its order and harmony. The Dutch chainbearer and the Yankee timberman, when put face to face with each other, quite naturally come to blows in the novel, for they stand for irreconcilable points of view and point for America to two opposite directions.

If the primitive Yankees like Thousandacres are bad and threatening, the civilized ones like Jason and Seneca Newcome are worse and more dangerous. Masked by an slick surface of hypocrisy and education, these "locusts", so House says, appear to be more civilized than their squatter brothers only because they have learned to use the law and public opinion, rather than the axe and the rope, as the tools of their avarice.[31] Having "reared a superstructure of New Haven finish and proportions," Jason, Mordy observes, certainly knows how to use his education to its fullest limit for his materialistic gains. In Satanstoe Jason is an ordinary schoolteacher who has merely succeeded in acquiring a mill-seat from Corny's father-in-law on a cheap lease; yet in The Chainbearer he has become "the most thriving man at Ravensnest," laying his hands on virtually all the business of the community. He is described by Mordy:

> Everything seemed to pass through his hands; or, it would be better to say, everything entered them, though little indeed came out again. This

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[31]House, Cooper's Americans, 138.

> man was one of those moneyed gluttons, on a small scale, who live solely to accumulate; in my view, the most odious character on earth; the accumulations having none of the legitimate objects of proper industry and enterprise in view. So long as there was a man near him whom he supposed to be richer than himself, Mr. Newcome would have been unhappy; though he did not know what to do with the property he had already acquired. One does not know whether to detest or to pity such characters the most; since, while they are and must be repugnant to every man of right feelings and generous mind, they carry in their own bosoms the worm that never dies, to devour their own vitals(C, 319).

The "worm," or the serpent, is Cooper's motif of the Newcome family; it grows in its viciousness to society as the Littlepage trilogy progresses.

In the first volume, Jason is only a potential threat to the security of Corny's garden world. His traits, revealed in "vulgarity of mind and manners," have not attained the potency of fatality; therefore his presence is still harmless to Littlepage's beloved social harmony. In other words, he is merely a newcomer, as his name implies, who is exerting himself to gain a foothold within the social structure of which Littlepage has secure control. Posted there as a target of a comic foil rather than a dangerous villain, the Yankee schoolteacher is frequently ridiculed in comparison with other characters, especially the Dutchmen. Therefore, his major faults are often measured in terms of his New England English-- spelling, pronunciation, and usage-- and his unnatural manners-- his insistence that a lady be properly addressed as "Miss" and that her admission

to a Pinkster show be paid by the accompanying man. Although the sincerity of his acts is often questioned and criticized, Jason, by and large, is tolerated by Corny and his friends.[32]

But when he appears in the second volume as an ambitious man who has begun to get his hands on the economic and political hold of the settlement, Jason is no longer a joke nor tolerated as a pet serpent, but is viewed as a menace to the society. Here, Cooper does not seem to be concerned with how the Yankee talks any more; instead he focuses his attention on the economic and social impact Necome's actions have exerted on the society. Hired as the Littlepages' local agent, Jason works against his employer's interests by secretly participating in Thousandacres' robbery of the lumber that belongs to the Littlepage. He seizes every opportunity for his materialistic gains and tries to cheat other people including his squatter partner. He greedily bases his three-lives lease on the lives of three infants, and when all three quickly die, he bitterly complains about the unfairness of the lease, accusing Littlepage of robbing him of all his "hard earnin's"(C, 321). Worst of all, Jason, as Cooper warns, has become a respectable member of the Ravensnest community and has the demagogic power to manipulate the people to get the result

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[32]Corny comments that Jason, despite his conceit, his vulgarity, and his English, still has some strong points. Satanstoe, 264.

he wants. For example, in mustering sufficient support for the Congregational denomiantion, he maneuvers adroitly to achieve the appearance of majority rule by eliminating those eligible to vote against his own preference in the matter(C, 293-297).

If Jason in The Chainbearer is a adolescent serpent that begins to walk upright for its hunting practice, his descendant, Seneca Newcome in The Redskins, becomes a fully grown one capable of deadly attack. Camouflaging himself with a lawyer's license to seek justice for common people and to establish a society of true democracy and equality, Seneca in effect practices the law to satisfy his personal greed and represents, as Cooper warns, a group of vicious social parasites who set their personal gains above all law and justice and invade "with perfect impunity the most precious rights of their fellow-citizens"(R, 512).

Viewed in the sense of class conflict, Seneca is overtly both a moral and a physical enemy of the Littlepages. Adopting the antisocial principles of Thousandacres, Seneca tries, with the other anti-renters, to subvert the landlord's system which he repeatedly condemns as "pernicious and feudal." Like the squatter, he bases his principle on his desires of the moment, arguing that the people can change at will the rules by which society operates, and employ for their own ends the means to insure

justice and equality.[33] As a way to manipulate the public opinions and, ultimately, the state law, Seneca and his "Injin" fellows organize mass meetings to rant about liberty, equality and justice and to accuse the Littlepage family of standing for slavery, aristocracy and injustice. In the meantime, they also resort to violence attempting to terrorize the Littlepages and their supporters into surrender.[34]

To counter the anti-renters' attacks, the Littlepages and their supporters too pick up their guns. The fact that both sides confront each other by means of violence brings the land dispute into an open class conflict. For the anti-renters, their violent actions against the landowners are sanctioned by the spirit of Jacksonian democracy, in the future of which, Seneca declares, "there will be no privileged classes in New York, at least"(R, 511). The landlords, as one anti-renter reasons, had exploited their tenants long enough, so "It's time that poor folks had some chance"(R, 659). Deep in Cooper's consciousness, however,

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[33]The Anti-Rent arguments are noted throughout The Redskins, but see especially 517-524, 577-578, 602-604.

[34]Apparently Cooper was familiar with not only the Anti-Renters' arguments but also the details of their actions against the landlords during the Anti-Rent Movement. See Christman's Tin Horns and Calico and Ellis' Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region 1790-1850. In The Redskins, Cooper includes such descriptions of tenants' meeting, the Injins' armed harassment of their opponents and their attempt to set fire to the Littlepage house at Revensnest. See 574-576, 588-593, 650-653.

the tendencies of the leveling democracy as manifested by the violence of Seneca and his Injins "betokened the downfall of a nation"(R, 654). Because if this evil spirit is allowed to spread, so Cooper warns in the last volume of the trilogy, it will shine like "an 'evil deed in a naughty world,'" burning down not merely Littlepage's barn in Ravensnest but the very foundation of America's democracy(R, 656).

CHAPTER V

The Redskins: Social Progress and Audience

As he reached the portrayal of his own time and place in The Redskins, the trilogy's final volume, Cooper seemed to have lost interest as well as confidence in his narrative ability to manipulate his readers' aesthetic experience.[1] Distressed by "a besetting vice of America"(R, 482), Cooper was no longer concentrating on the characterization of his landed gentry; instead he concentrated on his rhetoric, which became more politically obtrusive and belligerent. Viewed in this connection, The Redskins is often said to be Cooper's most unreadable narrative, equally a disaster as a work of art and a tool of persuasion.[2]

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[1]In his recent book, Warren Motley points out that Cooper's rhetorical problem in The Redkins results from the fact that at the time Cooper was "acutely aware of his minority position" and thereby "despaired of overcoming the public's acceptance of what seemed to him a debased idea of democratic society." The American Abraham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 148.

[2]Grossman remarks that "some of Cooper's later novels of direct propaganda were often wildly hysterical in their appeal for a life of reason and restraint." In the case of The Redskins, Hugh's tone "varies for the most part between a sustained hysterical sneer and pompous indignation. His propaganda is of the sort that convinces only the rabid partisans on his own side." James Fenimore Cooper, 6, 213. McWilliams sees that "as the landed gentry evolved through the three stages of American life, they become increasingly

The Redskins, however, cannot be dismissed simply as a hysterical propaganda exercise that accomplishes nothing but a blow to Cooper's artistic reputation. Rather, its literary significance has to be evaluated in conjunction with its articulation of the dominant economic and ideological factors and the contradictions Cooper had to contend with at that particular historical moment in Jacksonian America. Analyzed in this sense, the last book of the Littlepage series in effect offers us more of what was going on in Cooper's mind in his later career and helps us to reconstruct materially and theoretically the unities and contradictions which structure his apparently disparate roles as a social critic and an artist.

I

The Decay of the American Mind

American social progress, as Cooper analyzed it, consisted of three periods.[3] The first was that of the frontier settlement, the period characterized by the quality of "good-will" fellowship which gave life much of the

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less winning." Political Justice in a Republic, 310.

[3]As mentioned, Cooper divided the subjects of the Littlepage trilogy into what he called "Colony," "Revolution" and "Republic" to exhibit the social changes. In Home As Found he writes specifically about the three periods, using as an example the town of Templeton. See Home As Found in Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, 6:83-85.

harmony, a sense of "careless association and buoyant merriment of childhood"(HAF, 84). The second social period was that of the emerging town or city in which society marshaled itself into classes, and people struggled for social place. Here, the influence of money and greed began to take the place of enterprise and good-will; political demagogues and unscrupulous businessmen fought for the leading roles in the life of the growing community. This period, according to Cooper, was "usually of longer duration" and was also "the least inviting condition" of any civilized society(HAF, 84). To Cooper, the third stage was the most desired because it was a society governed by the laws and merits. Here, stability was established as families and individuals had found their proper places; and "the heart-burnings and jealousies" driven by money lost their significance as a means to distinction, as moral or intellectual qualifications for leadership were put above everything else.

The recurrent articulation of this type of social change as noted in Cooper's work, both fiction and non-fiction, is undoubtedly a reflection of the Cooper's changing views of American democracy and social progress.[4] Before he went to Europe in 1826, Cooper had known his

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[4]Besides the Littlepage trilogy, Homeward Bound, and Home As Found,Cooper discusses the issue of American democracy and social progress in the Leatherstocking novels, The Notions of the Americans, The American Democrat, The Mokikins, The Crater, The Ways of the Hour, etc.

country in the first and third stages. In Cooperstown he had lived what he considered a happy frontier life in which good-will abounded in the community and people, though being humble in terms of wealth, were generally content to go about their individual affairs in peace and quiet. In Albany and New York City he had been a member of established society, wherein he was exposed to what was to him a high type of social culture, and found that this group of people possessed outstanding moral or intellectual qualities.[5] To Cooper, the fact that fine men like John Jay held political and social leadership was the most important feature of the third stage of America's democracy.

The course of Cooper's good way of life, however, was altered in the era of Jacksonian democracy. When he came home from his eight-year stay in Europe, America no longer seemed America to his eyes, for it was plunged into a state of chaos and degradation, the second stage Cooper feared and had attempted to avoid. "The whole country is in such a constant state of mutation that I can only liken it to the game of children, in which, as one quits his corner, another runs into it," as he complains in Home As Found(62). This "constant state of mutation" taking place in his homeland, Cooper judged, did not make for improvement; rather it came

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[5]As mentioned in my first chapter, Cooper in this period was a popular figure in the literary circles and closely associated himself with the members of such prominent families as the Jays and the DeLanceys.

with many bad elements that forced society backward. In place of laws and morality, "the game" of American democracy was now regulated by the factor of sheer numbers and the corruption of common greed. And for enlightenment and leadership, the public now turned to the selfish and unscrupulous men represented by political demagogues and their followers.

When he wrote The Notions of the Americans in 1828, Cooper probably had not anticipated that America might soon find itself in a predicament wherein the ill-guided public sentiment expressed by unscrupulous demagogues and journalists could subvert common sense and individualistic morality. But what he had experienced in Europe and after his return to America evidently had a great impact on his views of the American polity and social progress.[6] Although he now still insisted on his belief in maximizing individual liberty, he began to redefine the meaning of liberty.[7] In short, Cooper's true liberty now does not stand by itself

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[6]McWilliams examines the changes of Cooper's views in his comparative study of Notions of the Americans and The American Democrat. See "Cooper and the Conservative Democrat." American Quarterly, 22 (1970):665-677.

[7]Cooper wrote that "Individuality is the aim of political liberty. By leaving to the citizen as much freedom of action and of being, as comports with order and the rights of others, the institutions render him truly a freeman"(TAD, 231). In the meantime, he also argued that "Although it is true, that no genuine liberty can exist without being based on popular authority in the last resort, it is equally true that it can not exist when thus based, without many restraints on the power of the mass"(TAD, 65).

but comes together with the exercise of restraints as exemplified by the model of Chainbearer. His equivocal position, as McWilliams points out, clings to the utmost liberty to which people are entitled in America's democratic polity, yet simultaneously wants to confine it so as to guard against the possibility of the tyranny of the majority.[8]

To Cooper, the Anti-Rent movement was a striking example of the conspired rioting of the majority that happened in the land of America.[9] Its blame involved the faults of the public as well as the demagoues and politicans. Acutely aware that the virtues of the democratic polity were contingent upon an enlightened populace, Cooper found to his disappointment that the typical American was

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[8]McWilliams, "Cooper and the Conservative Democrat," 668-669.

[9]While in Europe, Cooper was very much concerned with the politics there. Days after the July Revolution of 1830 started, in which King Charles X was forced to abdicate and his cousin, the duke of Orleans, was put on the throne as Louis Philippe, Cooper rushed to Paris-- most of which then had already fallen into the insurgent hands-- to see the movement. He "had watched these developments critically and advised tactfully when the busy Lafayette(his friend and also Commander of the Guards) consulted him." "The capital mistake made in 1830," Cooper thought, "was that of establishing the throne before establishing the republic; in trusting to men, instead of trusting to institutions." Letters and Journals, 2:4. In comparing the July Revolution with the Revolution of 1789, Cooper wrote in his letter to Peter Jay that "France of 1789 no more resembled what France is now, than a man in a fury resembles one simply resolved to protect his rights." " If she(France) recede, Europe will recede; if she advance, Europe will advance." Letters and Jounals, 1:419-420.

ignorant of the national principles of political equality and individualism. As seen in his novels, especially in The Redskins, the majority of people tend toward mediocrity in all things, including knowledge. The few vague figures among the masses whom Hugh and Uncle Ro confront on their family estate are concerned mostly with trivialities of their individual lives and fancy "the world never knew anything of principles, facts, or tendencies"(R, 601).

Playing upon this public ignorance, the demagogues and politicans are, therefore, able to build and spread misinformation as to American principles and induce in the public a general feeling of smugness, self-righteousness and selfishness. Take the scene of the public meeting in The Redskins for example. When the lecturer delivers his lengthy anti-rent speech, he calls on the audience to abolish the existing tenancy system by appealing to their emotion and self-interests.[10] Although the Littlepages consider the speaker to be an "inflated fool" who merely attempts to corrupt common sense, most of the audience respond to him positively. The fact that such an illogical speech "hit a chord that vibrated through the whole assembly" reveals what

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[10]Cooper gives a lengthy account of the anti-rent speech and then has his narrator analyze it: "The speaker was fluent, inflated, and anything but logical. Not only did he contradict himself, but he contradicted the laws of nature. The intelligent reader will not require to be reminded of the general character of a speech that was addressed to the passions and interests of such an audience, rather than to their reason"(R, 589).

was to Cooper the degradation of the American mind which involved the problems of both ignorance and greed(R, 592). The corruption of public opinion and will, as Cooper has his narrator testify, was not an unfortunate case of an ignorant or naive constituency being unknowingly misguided and exploited by the immoral demagogues and politicans but a conspiracy prompted by the common greed on both sides. "It is the naivete with which men reconcile the obvious longing of covetousness with what they are pleased to fancy the principles of liberty"(R, 498)!

Given Cooper's view of American social progress and the actual odds of adversity of 1840s he had to face, it is not surprising to see that the society of Ravensnest in The Redskins evolves from a once harmonious garden into a cultural mire and violent battleground. In Satanstoe and The Chainbearer Ravensnest had been merely a wooden fortress at the edge of a cliff with a small number of laboriously recruited tenants; in The Redskins there now stands in its place a Littlepage stone mansion surrounded by a growing community of settlers. Materially, the town of Ravensnest in The Redskins is well established: the roads have been built, the forest has been cleared, the original Congregational meeting hall has been expanded. Morally, however, the society of Ravensnest has regressed. The decreasing number of its principled, upright citizens includes only the highly "civilized" Hugh and Ro Littlepage, members of their family,

and a small circle of allies. In contrast, the "coarse-minded and vulgar" represented by the Anti-Rent extremists have grown in number and popularity, and the society has been turned into a cultural wasteland.

The erosion of democratic principles, as Cooper stressed repeatedly, resulted from the disease of "palpable cupidity and covetousness" that permeated the American mind and deluded the society to destruction(R, 464). In pondering why "the country and the people have strangely altered"(R, 560), Cooper has Hugh's sister make the point:

> And can anything sooner or more effectually alter a people than longings for the property of others? Is not the 'love of money the root of all evil?'-- and what right have we to suppose our Ravensnest population is better than another, when that sordid feeling is thoroughly aroused? You know you have written me yourself, that all the American can or does live for is money(R, 560).

This popular sentiment of selfishness, especially the longings for the money and property of others, Hugh insists, suppresses the truth and leaves no other incentive to exertion.[11] As seen in The Redskins, the majority of the populace stands by, mutely tolerating, if not supporting, the marauding of the anti-renters; and at the same time the body politic "substantially did nothing," for its members are more concerned about how to win the "Injins'" votes

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[11]Consequently, Hugh sees that "Military fame, military rank, even, are unattainable under our system; the arts, letters, and science bring little or no reward; there being no political rank that a man of refinement would care for, men must live for money, or live altogether for another state of being"(R, 560).

rather than how to fight them(R, 481).

Placed in this age of decadence, the two Littlepage characters in The Redskins are also adversely affected, if not totally corrupted, and may no longer claim the representative traits and status of their ancestors.[12] As the grandson of Mordy Littlepage, Hugh seems to have inherited little of his grandfather's admirable qualities, but instead is a spoiled, arrogant young man who, as the novel opens, has been away from the family estate and America for five years touring Europe and the Near East for the sake of becoming "a man of the world"(R, 467). With him on the tour is his Uncle Ro, an old bachelor who, if anything, is more arrogant and bad-tempered than his nephew and who has spent his time living extravagantly in self-exile from his native land for twenty of his fifty-nine years.

Hugh's overseas tour was supposed to clean "the specks of provincialism from off the diamond of republican water" and to "teach a great deal to the old world"(R, 466). Yet,

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[12]Gosgrove argues that Hugh and Ro unwittingly work against the model of the Littlepage way of life depicted in the first two Littlepage novels. "They are the least admirable representatives of the family line because they have replaced the Littlepage love of family, land, and society with self-righteous class pride, love of profit, and contempt for their tenants." "Family Lineage and Narrative Pattern in Cooper's Littlepage Trilogy," 7. Gosgrove well analyzes the flaws of the late Littlepage characters in connection with the notion of the decay of the American mind but does not look into Cooper's growing awareness of the inevitability of the innate nature of human corruption which eventually led the author to turn to religion as the solution.

neither of the two tasks has he accomplished when the tour is over. Hugh and his uncle bring back with them to America a strong obsession for profit-making in addition to a great deal of pomposity and pride. In contrast to Corny's loveable honesty and Mordy's strong sense of responsibility in the celebration of the family association with the land, Huge and Uncle Ro relate themselves to the family merely in terms of its financial assets. Hugh's account of his family, given at the beginning of the story, reads:

> My uncle Ro, however, had got both Satanstoe and Lilacsbush; two country-houses and farms, which, while they did not aspire to the dignity of being estates, were likely to prove more valuable, in the long run, than the broad acres which were intended for the patrimony of the elder brother.... my aunts having handsome legacies, in the way of bonds and mortgages, on an estate called Mooseridge, in addition to some lots in town; while my own sister, Martha, had a clear fifty thousand dollars in money. I had town-lots, also, which were becoming productive; and a special minority of seven years had made an accumulation of cash that was well vested in New York State stock, and which promised well for the future(R, 466).

Here, money is the main measurement of the family achievements; its members are distinguished not by their personalities but by the respective amount of money they each have either in land or stock.

Uncle Ro is a respected member of the family mainly because of his wit and ability to manage and profitably speculate on his inherited estates. Handling his inherited Satanstoe and Lilacsbush as a piece of merchandise in contrast to Corny's engaging affection for every tree of

Satanstoe, Uncle Ro sells part of Satanstoe shortly after his father's death and is quite content with the profit he has made from the sale. In a tone of pride, he tells Hugh that he has made a even bigger profit on the sale of Lilacsbush: "Ah, that was a clean transaction, and has left no drawbacks.... I got three hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, in hard cash. I would give no credit, and have every dollar of the money, at this moment, in good six per cent stock of the States of New York and Ohio"(R, 470).

While the prompt realization of profit makes Uncle Ro sell his Lilacsbush, the good prospect of Ravensnest leads Hugh to decide to hold on to it for his chance. Upon learning that "many of the tenants of Ravensnest had joined the association, paid tribute for the support of 'Injins'," Hugh and his uncle have immediately returned home because of the fear of losing money(R, 483). Although through the narrator lengthy discussions of law and morality are presented, Hugh's personal grievance as a landlord is in effect fairly simple: he does not want to dispose of his estate on his tenants' terms; therefore government pressure to compel him to sell-- except in the form of enough money to tempt him-- is unlawful(R, 479).

Hugh's unwillingness to sacrifice any of his due profit demonstrates what Cooper saw as the essence of the ethical doctrine of Jacksonian America: the main objective of the

good life was the pursuit of the dollar.[13] In ignorance of other paths to distinction and superiority, both the landlords and the tenants in effect shared the same ambition of money-getting and their codes of morality were therefore equally debased and selfish. While the acquisition of money was the mark of success for one way of life, it was also the cause of failure in other terms.[14] Through the words of Susquesus, an old Onondaga Indian living at Ravensnest, Cooper questions the feasibility of his vision of America as a garden-like nation:

> The pale-faces had it as they wished. They made laws, and sold the land, as the red-men sell the skins of beavers. When money was paid, each pale-face got a deed and thought he owned all that he had paid for. But the wicked spirit that drove out the red-man is now about to drive off the pale-face chiefs. It is the same devil, and it is no other. He wanted land then, and he wants land now(R, 706).

Susquesus' estimate of "the wicked spirit" brings in an

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[13]Prior to The Redskins, in The Monikins(1835), his satirical allegory in which he criticized American ways of doing things in the Jacksonian era, Cooper cursed: "'Dollar-- dollar-- dollar'-- nothing but 'dollar'!.... The word rang at the corners-- in the public ways-- at the exchange-- in the drawing room-- ay, even in churches. If a temple had been reared for the worship of the Creator, the first question was, How much did it cost?" The Monikins in Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, 7:413.

[14]In the first two novels, the virtues of the Littlepage way of life are based on the moral standards of the personal merits and refinements, but when it comes to the time of The Redskins, Huge sees wealth as the base of social distinction when he says: "by the time they can go to the quick with their dollars, they will become useful members of society, and be honored and esteemed accordingly"(R, 483.).

indictment against the landlords as well as the anti-renters, and may be cited as an evidence of Cooper's awareness of the innate nature of human corruption. To a certain extent, the old Indian's climactic speech also illustrates Cooper's ambivalent view of man's possession of property and wealth, suggesting that the very motive of human greed has the equal forcefulness in building and destroying society. With his painful realization of the growing darkness which seemed to encircle the whole society, Cooper was reluctant to despair but fought on against heavy odds in a tone of escalating belligerence, a manner characteristic of the son of the unyielding judge of Cooperstown when he was agitated.

II

The Rhetorical Problems

In Satanstoe and The Chainbearer Cooper's didacticism is for the most part covert and self-restrained. In The Redskins, however, the rhetorical sophistication noted in the first two novels is reduced to rhetorical crudity because too much is argued, too little is dramatized, for it to succeed as a novel. The story is more an undisguised, bitter denunciation of American politics than a fictional description of the Littlepages' experience of home as found.

Poor characterization is one obvious flaw that may be

cited in comparing The Redskins with the first two Littlepage narratives. In the continuity of the characters of the aged Indian and the Negro Cooper has managed to find a pair of symbols to give the story some liveliness and to provide the whole series with a sense of unity and coherence. But there is no character as lovable as Corny nor as humbly noble as Chainbearer; nor is there any dark, powerful foe like Thousandacres. The model of landed gentry represented by the late generations of the Littlepages is impotent and colorless, in contrast to the engaging forcefulness of their ancestors. Their presence in the narrative seems to revolve around one purpose: to fulfill the author's compulsion to educate the public's reason to distinguish the true from the false in the Anti-Rent dispute.

Cooper's compulsion to instruct the American public in the Anti-Rent controversy leads him to ignore not only his characters but also the general codes of fiction. In pursuit of his didactic objective, Cooper breaks the established practice of indirection and adopts excessive preaching by means of either direct authorial comments or characters' thinly disguised dialogues. The preface to The Redskins is in effect a polemical essay which contains Cooper's argumentative assertions directed at demagogues, politicians, and the public sentiment of common greed. It sets the novel's prevailing tone of stark didacticism and

turns a fictional narrative into a political monograph.

The candor of author's polemics is defended as a way to "hit the nail on the head," for according to Hugh, it is no time to disguise reality, and America should be guided to the correct perspective by viewing things as they are(R, 482). Candid as it is, The Redskins holds little interest in terms of its characterization and plot and therefore does not compare with either of the two earlier stories of the trilogy as a work of fiction. For instance, there is little of the pictorial description of the frontier life that gives liveliness and beauty to the world of Satanstoe. There is no rendering of the animated details like the pigeon hunt and church-building in The Chainbearer. Nor are there dramatized incidents like Corny's escape from the melting ice of the Hudson River, the Indian attack on Ravensnest, Mordy's captivity at the secret sawmill of Thousandacres. Instead, having offered us a brief glance at a New York now beset with the vice of common greed, Cooper takes us to confront the situation of the "redskins" at Ravensnest with an outburst of his own bitterness and indignation. Admittedly, in The Redskins there are insertions of such incidents as a mass meeting and a barn-burning, but their descriptions are minimal and drab, used merely to introduce the author's lengthy preachments.[15]

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[15]Cooper's exhortations are repeated literally on almost very page of the book, mostly through the long dialogues and monologues engaged by Hugh and his uncle.

In studying the last book of the trilogy we may wonder why Cooper could not have finished what he had well begun in the first two volumes. Why did he suddenly lose confidence in his narrative's ability to cultivate the aesthetic experience of his audience and resort instead to a method of shrill didacticism which does but ill service to the effectiveness of his intended purpose?

The problem of Cooper's rhetoric in The Redskins is not simply a question of the art of discourse; it incorporates, I think, the novel's given rhetorical context in which Cooper, acutely aware of his minority position, contended with his time and his audience. By the time the last volume of the trilogy came out, Cooper's contention with the Anti-Rent War-- to him, a prime evidence of American social deterioration-- had already literally lost. As America's first professional novelist, Cooper's success, James Wallace contends, owes a great deal to his sensitivity to the problem of cultivating an audience.[16] But by this point in his career, Cooper's primary concern was not to entertain but to educate his readers, and his popularity with the contemporary reading public had long since greatly diminished. Reluctant as he was to face this fact, Cooper was practical enough not to anticipate a good reception of

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Sometimes, one dialogue or monologue runs so long (for several pages) that the reader may find it hard to keep track of whose speech it is.

[16]James Wallace, Early Cooper and His Audience, 64.

his trilogy from the American public.[17] When the unexpected news came that The Redskins was "warmly" received, especially by "the better classes," Cooper was pleased and attributed it to what he called the victory of the book's "common sense."[18]

"Common sense" is what Cooper saw as the most crucial componment of American democracy; it is the primary subject he was trying to illustrate to his audience in the Littlepage trilogy. In his attempt to form a nucleus of supporters who, he hoped, would then influence American society at large, Cooper too ambitiously targeted his trilogy at a wide range of sub-groups within the novel-reading public of the 1840's. Unquestionably, the group he trusts most as his allies are the readers of "the better classes," men of education and merits. These people are the

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[17]In a letter to a fellow-novelist, James Kirke Paulding, just two months before Redskins came out, Cooper mentioned that his publishers had been unsuccessful in selling the first edition of Satanstoe and The Chainbearer. The problem, as Cooper saw it, lay in the fact that "the press is a solid phalanx against me, and I am unpopular with the country, generally-- Indeed, were it not for the convenience of correcting proof sheets, I would not mean to publish in this country at all." Letters and Journals, 5:131.

[18]The Redskins was published in London on July 6, 1846 under the title Ravensnest; or The Redskins; it came out in New York sometime in July or early August in the same year. Weeks after its publication, Cooper, in two separate letters to his wife, made the mention of the book. In one letter, he wrote: "Redskins is making quite a sensation, in the high set, to my surprise!" In another he said: "Redskins is in great favour with the better classes. The praise I have heard of it, has been warm, and is, I doubt not, sincere. Its time is just coming. The common sense of the book tells." Letters and Journals, 5:164, 166.

very members of the actual landed gentry of his day with whom Cooper identifies in writing his trilogy. His main concern with them is to strengthen their resolve to resist the intimidation of the mob, whether that intimidation takes the direct form of violence by the "Injins" or the indirect form of abused laws. In setting example for the landlords, Cooper has both Mordy and Hugh demonstrate their firm resolution when dealing with their avaricious tenants. To make his point more explicit, Cooper even has his narrator lift up his voice and give an italicized warning:

> The landlord who will grant a new lease to the individual who is endeavoring to undermine his rights, by either direct or indirect means, commits the weakness of arming an enemy with the knife by which he is himself to be assaulted, in addition to the error of granting power to a man who, under the character of a spurious liberty, is endeavoring to unsettle the only conditions on which civilized society can exist(C, 322).

As compared with the landed gentry, another segment of his targeted audience is far less virtuous and reliable. Made up of those who hold political offices, this group, to Cooper's dismay, often tend to compromise what they know to be right in order to maintain themselves in office. Yet, despite the fact that he views most of these officeholders as untrustworthy, Cooper still attempts to appeal to their sense of principle, hoping some of them may stand up for the common sense and justice like John Jay.[19]

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[19]Cooper has Hugh and Ro praise Governor John Jay as the exemplary public official who did not compromise his principles in the times of crises. Ro recalls that during

Besides the people of higher station, Cooper also seeks the attention of those from the lower social classes such as tenant farmers, agricultural or mechanical workers, and storekeepers. The primary task he attempts to accomplish with this segment of his implied readership is to educate and reform them. He wants to induce them to see "common sense" so that they will be able to identify themselves with the examples of "the real bone and sinew" like Chainbearer and the mechanic Hall and guard themselves against "locusts" like the Newcomes and Thousandacres.[20] Comfortable with a trans-Atlantic audience who often turned out to be more responsive to the aging novelist than his fellow countrymen, Cooper also tries to appeal to the old world for whatever international moral, and financial, support he can gather for his position as a writer.[21]

Jay's administration, "an attempt to resist the payment of rent was made on the manor of the Livingstons;" but he "PUT THE EVIL DOWN instanter"(R, 476). The result of Jay's swift action, as Ro sees, was a happy one for the well-being of the whole society.

[20] Despite his direct didacticism, Cooper was occasionally conscious of using these minor characters of lower class as the Littlepages'surrogates to make arguments. For example, in describing the effect of Hall's second public defense of the Littlepages, Huge remarks that "had the same sentiment been delivered by one in a fine coat," it would not have been as effective with the audience assembled mainly for the occasion of the anti-rent speech(R, 593).

[21] In the trilogy, especially in The Redskins, Cooper continues to instruct his European readers on America and Americans as he does noticeably in Notions of the Americans, The American Democrat and the Effingham novels. Among the things Cooper attempts to establish with the characters of Hugh and Ro is that not all Americans have to be provincial.

Cooper's plea for common sense in The Redskins proves to be a failure, not to his surprise, and what happened in reality goes against his hope that the novel would be "sensational" and "its time is just coming." Rhetorically, the failure can be attributed to the following problems: his choice of the topic so contentious as the Anti-Rent controversy, his ambition to aim at a heterogeneous audience whose political positions are widely scattered, and most importantly, his tactless strategy of thundering his "truth" directly out at his readers. It would seem that the last novel of the trilogy would have been far more effective had Cooper been more tactful in handling these rhetorical restraints. But he could not do that because in The Redskins his political concern ultimately overrides his consideration of rhetorical context, and his objective here is not to amuse but to criticize.

In this sense, the main reason for Cooper's failure is not rhetorical but political. His appeal did not succeed with his audience chiefly because his principles of individualism were incompatible with the political and economic tendencies of Jacksonian America. Unquestionably, his attack on leveling democracy, by its tactless presentation and its forthright, harsh criticism, was

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As seasoned travelers of the other parts of the world, the late Littlepages are "removed from such a weakness" of provincialism and are therefore able to discern both the strong and weak points the new world has as compared with the old one(R, 468).

offensive to many readers, and consequently alienated the author from them; yet it seems certain that, whatever the rhetorical manner of his presentation, his audience would have been offended by the very content of his criticism. Had he tactfully wrapped up his social critique with a better characterization and a more interesting story line, there is still little reason to believe that a novel like The Redskins would have been heeded by his countrymen.

Early in his career Cooper's understanding of his readers and the book market had brought him financial independence, established his fame, and placed him high in the estimation of his countrymen. In the late period of his life, Cooper knowingly gave up all these things because "he refused to compromise his principles for popularity and labored mightily to improve his readers' taste and to serve what he perceived to be the cultural needs of his nation."[22] Financially and professionally he paid a high price for this endeavor and tried his utmost to serve his country dutifully. But except for an occasional spark of interest, most of his late writings were ignored because under the common impulse to conquer the future by new political and economic reforms, America was no longer what it had been, nor was the marketplace of its audience. Unwilling to be reconciled to these swift changes, Cooper resented and vigorously railed against the fact that he, like the

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[22]James Wallace, Early Cooper and His Audience, X.

landlords in the Anti-Rent movement, was "sadly behind the age"(R, p. 494). Yet his struggle for his golden vision of the past ultimately failed, for his contemporaries were at that time looking forward to a new, less aristocratic America and had no time to pause for a product as distasteful as the Littlepage trilogy.

CHAPTER VI

Beyond the Limits of Earthly Being

When the Littlepage trilogy was completed in 1846, Cooper was fifty-seven years old and had only a few more years to live. As he looked at his nation, he saw nothing but a picture of the degenerating state of American society, marked by the social and political upheavals of Jacksonian democracy and the spread of a vulgar and unscrupulous spirit of common greed. The cause of all this, Cooper argued, was the "inherent principle in the corrupt nature of man to misuse all his privileges"(C, 331). The awareness that "Whatever man touches he infallibly abuses"(R, 480) led the aging novelist to doubt seriously the ability of imperfect man to create and retain anything of lasting good; and in pondering over the entire cycle of civilization, his religious convictions, which had always been there, became more and more dominant. In the the next of his novels, The Crater, Cooper continued his laboratory-like studies of the mechanisms and principles of social change, this time using the example of an isolated community in the Pacific rather than the local one of Ravensnest in his home state.

The Crater, an anti-Utopian fantasy, came out one year

after The Redskins. Although on the surface it is developed as a tale of a Robinson Crusoe-like adventure and the social criticism becomes dominant only in the last part of the book, its theme bears a close resemblance to that of the Littlepage trilogy: the decay that occurs in society when the moral purpose that gave it life has been lost. The first half of the novel is concerned with the founding of the Utopian colony. Mark Woolston, the young first mate of an American vessel, is shipwrecked on a volcanic atoll in the mid-Pacific. With no neighbors, politicians, or newspaper editors to beset him, Mark can arrange life on his island entirely to suit himself and seeks and finds the Providential existence in the harmony of nature around him. Rapidly, the island develops into a thriving colony with Mark at its head. Being a man of deep knowledge and sincere faith-- the result of his early education and of his unusual experience on the reef-- Governor Woolston governs his new democratic community with justice and moral principle. Thus it is a happy and just society where all men have equal rights but where only the most virtuous and talented lead. In reading the author's description of this stage of the society in The Crater one can hardly miss Cooper's emphasis: people must submit in humility to the reign of law and moralities, the moral foundation must be laid before any lasting society can be formed.

As the colony grows in numbers and in wealth and as new

colonists, especially Yankee lawyers, newspaper editor, and ministers, are admitted, the place begins to lose its peacefulness and becomes infested with problems. Like Thousandacres and the calico "Injins," these "newcomers" defy all law and morals and entertain the mistaken notion that they, the people, are sovereign in all affairs and are free to do whatever they please. Under the influence of this leveling democracy, the people start to abandon the humility they once possessed, and come to believe that they are the cause of their own good fortune and that they deserve the good things that have come to the island.

Soon the island becomes as unbearable to Mark as America sometimes was to Cooper.[1] Robbed of both his property and his office in a carefully manipulated election, Mark leaves his decaying colony just in time to avoid a volcanic eruption that later drowns the island. The destruction of the colony is viewed by Mark as the judgment of God upon a society that has abandoned moral principles for the pursuit of materialistic desires. For Cooper, the abortion of Mark's Utopia is the result of the eventual and perhaps inevitable manifestation of human imperfection. In

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[1]After his return from Europe, Cooper could never again persuade himself to be happy about what happened around him. Being on bad terms with the residents of his hometown, disgusted with the race of American journalists, and wary of the favors of his reading public, he liked to talk about moving back to Europe. "If I were fifteen years younger," said Cooper in a letter, "I would certainly go abroad, and never return." Letters and Journals, 5:131-132.

the description of the founding and subsequent evolution of Mark's colony, Cooper obviously intends The Crater to be a parable of the United States, which had once been a similar earthly paradise in which just principles of government had been established. With the doomed destiny of the Utopian colony, he seeks to warn his countrymen of a similar fate that may befall the contemporary American society:

> If those who now live in this republic can see any grounds for a timely warning in the events here recorded, it may happen that the mercy of a divine Creator may still preserve that which he has hitherto cherished and protected.[2]

By recording Mark's experiences in his island colony, Cooper managed to replay the major moral and social themes that dominate his Littlepage series. In the loving description of Mark's efforts first to cultivate the land of the reef to justify his claims to ownership and then to earn his role of leadership of the community which he founds there, we are reminded of the similar endeavors that the early generations of Littlepages had undertaken in founding their family estates. In Mark's protest of the elections manipulated by demagogues and journalists and his attempt to halt the contagion of common greed in the colony, we see the same anxiety and futility with which the later Littlepage characters confronted the moment of the leveling democracy as they tried to retain their political and economic status in the community. Like the Littlepages, whose attempt to

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[2]Cooper, The Crater in Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, 5:4.

halt the cycle of history ultimately ends in vain, Mark can not single-handedly shield his colony from the winds of change.

As Cooper demonstrates, the deterioration of two isolated communities-- one of Ravensnest in The Redskins and the other of Mark's colony in The Crater-- results from the same evil source: the innate nature of human corruption. Once men have lost their humility and self-restraint and become infested with "the wicked spirit" of greed, a society loses its moral vigor and political systems become corrosive and impotent. "It makes very little difference how men are ruled; they will be cheated; for, failing of rogues at head-quarters to perform that office for them, they are quite certain to devise some means of cheating themselves."[3]

In the light of this thematic insistence on the inevitability of human imperfection, everybody in the colony, including its governor, is susceptible to the universal tendency to seek the attainment of pride and wealth and therefore is equally responsible for the corruption of the colony.[4] In this sense, Mark is no longer

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[3]Ibid., 235.

[4]Although Cooper repeatedly assures us that Mark, as the representative of the worthy class, retains the simple humility of his days of adversity, in the last period of his reign as governor nearly every detail of his speech and manner suggests the contrary. Like the later generations of Littlepage, "the governor was getting to be rich, and like all wealthy men, he had a disposition to possess, in a proportionate degree, the comforts and elegancies of civilized life." The Crater, 198.

the attractive figure he once was, no longer the young man who lived in the solitude of a barren wilderness and maintained a constant contact with natural creations of God. He is now in society, and that has changed almost everything about him. So no matter how hard he tries, Mark's attempts to keep his colony from deterioration (and Cooper's efforts to steer America from the leveling movement back to the moral ways of its youth) only convey the image of a man engaged in a desperate and absolutely futile task to halt the cycle of history. To underscore the idea that this Utopian society of innocence, energy and harmony is predestined to go downward to decay and disintegration, Cooper introduces the famous analogy between the rise and fall of Mark's Pacific kingdom and Cole's magnificent series of paintings "The Course of Empire."[5] The process of civilization, as Cooper saw it, is the repetition of an ancient pattern:

> Rome, Greece, Egypt, and all that we know of the past, which comes purely of man and his passions; empires, dynasties, heresies and novelties, come and go like the change of the seasons; while the only thing that can be termed stable is the slow but sure progress of prophecy.[6]

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[5]Cooper's personal connection with Cole "was very slight," as he said in a letter to a friend, but he greatly admired the artist. Among Cole's works, Cooper considered "The Course of Empire" as the artist's best work, and praised the series as "a great epic poem, in which the idea far surpasses the execution." Letters and Journals, 5:396-397.

[6]The Crater, 76.

In this meaningless ebb and flow of civilization, the only sustained progress is the increase in the knowledge of God, a knowledge that will reach perfection at the millenium. In this sense, all human activities-- settlement, development, revolutions, happiness and misery-- are "but specks in the incidents of a universe." " The earth revolves, men are born, live their time, and die; communities are formed and are dissolved; dynasties appear and disappear; good contends with evil, and evil still has its day; the whole, however, advancing slowly but unerringly towards that great consummation, which was designed from the beginning, and which is as certain to arrive in the end, as that the sun sets at night and rises in the morning."[7] In the world of man which is a small point floating in space, no system devised by man's reason can halt the cycle of growth and decay or alter the predestined course "pointed out by an invisible finger" of God.

As social critic, Cooper had always tried to think, reason and act for himself; now in his last phase he abandoned much of his reason and objectivity. He pointed out how insignificant was human reason, how tremendous was faith.[8] Although he did not waver in his belief in the

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[7]Ibid., 77, 238.

[8]To Cooper, even science, the power of the human intellect, derives its only real value from its capacity to reveal the insignificance of man and the majesty of God. In his study of nature, Mark "had looked into these things from curiosity and a love of science; now, they impressed him

virtues of political democracy, or in his high opinion of considering the landed gentry as the worthy leaders of his country, years of personal struggle and observation of the leveling democracy of the Jacksonian era led him to wonder if his confidence were justified and America could ever become the earthly paradise he had once envisioned.

As Cooper the novelist, he was still urged by his duty to continue his attacks on the vices of American society. In his last four novels: Jack Tier(1848), The Oak Openings(1848), The Sea Lions(1849), and The Ways of the Hour(1850), he continued his criticism of the loss of value in American life in order to analyze the cause and present the cure as he had come to see it. But as Cooper the believer of God, he found that man was weak and prone to error and his faith in God's providential purposes helped to compensate him for the human folly he perceived. After 1848 Cooper began actively, searchingly to read the Bible, and at the end of his life what had been a merely cultural Christianity was converted to a deeply personal piety.[9]

On the level of political and economic controversy Cooper was still committed to the view that the destiny of

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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." The Crater, 77.

[9]Cooper consented to receive the sacraments of the Protestant Episcopal Church by Bishop DeLancey in July 1851, less than two months before his death. See The Letters and Journals, 6:255.

society could be controlled by the exertion of will and intelligence; yet on the level of spiritual conviction that view is engulfed in a profound sense of the insignificance of man and the almighty power of God. Examining in his final book the limitations of the human mind in the murder trial of Mary Monson and questioning whether America could be saved, Cooper could not find the solution in the political and economic system of American society.[10] Feeling despairing and helpless, he turned to God for strength and comfort: "God! Yes the Deity, in his Divine Providence; if anything is to save us."[11]

Since Cooper's time, the political and economic environment of the United States has changed drastically. With the rapid increase in knowledge of science and technology, America has long been considered as the world's most industrialized nation as well as the kingdom of democracy. However, the elements which Cooper saw, and

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[10]In The Ways of the Hour, Cooper's last full-length fictional work, the author evinces his concern about certain social problems in American society: lack of principle and moral values as shown in flagrant abuse of justice by elected judges, incompetent jurors, culpable lawyers, and an irresponsible press; an unreasoning worship of mass opinion; and failure to pursue the truth beneath the trappings of appearance. The vehicle for exploring the sociological theme is a mid-1840s mysterious murder case which demonstrates the mockery of justice that marks Mary Monson's trial. See The Ways of the Hour.

[11]Cooper, Ways of the Hour in The Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, 9:8. In closing a letter to his wife Cooper wrote: "We are in the hands of Providence, and I strive to submit." Letters and Journals, 5:372.

vigorously opposed, as degradation in a democratic society have persisted and multiplied in nearly every aspect of American life. To a large extent, the political and economic developments of the last one hundred and fifty years in the United States have been what Cooper feared and fought against. Today, the formidable power of the media and public opinion, the party politics and government scandals, the sanctification of success in terms of the attainment of money, the industrialization and commercialization at the mercy of the Wall Street computer-- all are normal outgrowths and further evidences of the degenerating society Cooper criticized.

Desirous of a social aristocracy of worth and merit and critical of the leveling democracy, Cooper witnessed, and recreated in his work, the characteristic appearance and action of America's transition from an old society into a new one. In other words, Cooper saw modern America in the making, and his social criticism of one hundred and fifty years ago can be applied to the nation's present as well as to its past. Through Cooper and his work, the reader can define his or her imaginative relationship to America's past, and from that cultural site of the nation's past press beyond for a critical understanding of its political and economic phenomena today. Viewed in this sense, Cooper, we may say, is not only a pioneer of American fiction but also a forerunner of American self-criticism.

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