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Charlie Phair

# **Navigating the Transatlantic Threshold**

*James Fenimore Cooper and the Revolutionary Atlantic*

Charlie Phair

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## Introduction

*The “neglected aspect of Cooper’s work”: James Fenimore Cooper as the pioneer of American Sea Fiction.*

“He knows the men and he knows the sea. His method may be often faulty, but his art is genuine.”

Joseph Conrad, *Tales of the Sea* 1898<sup>1</sup>

Since *The Odyssey*, there has always been a strong link between the ocean and literature.

Throughout the ages, the ocean has represented migration and transit from one divide to another.

From the waters of Walden Pond to the Mississippi river, from the Devil’s Grip to Cape Horn and the South Seas, America is no different, shaped and influenced by the liquid element perhaps more than

any other nation on the planet. ‘The larger story of the sea’s influence on American Literature’, as

Bert Bender says, ‘has never been told’. It is the aim of this thesis to investigate a crucial yet

neglected aspect of American literary history, the creation of the sea novel by James Fenimore

Cooper during the 1820s through *The Pilot* (1824), *The Red Rover*(1827) and *The Water Witch*

(1830).<sup>2</sup> Through examination of these sea romances, I intend to illustrate how they reflect the dual

nature of revolutionary rebellion and Anglo-American relationships of the period, through a new

recognition of the ocean and man’s place upon it.

James Fenimore Cooper died in 1851, the year *Moby-Dick* was published and subsequently forgotten by its contemporary audience. In a letter to the Cooper Memorial Committee in 1852, Herman Melville confessed an admiration of the late author’s work which produced such ‘a vivid and

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<sup>1</sup> In his essay *Tales of the Sea* (first published in Outlook upon the 4<sup>th</sup> June 1898), Joseph Conrad charts Fenimore Cooper as well as Frederick Marryat as the key influences upon his own maritime writing. George Dekker (ed.), *James Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) pp. 287-288

<sup>2</sup> Bert Bender *Sea Brothers: The Tradition of American Sea Fiction from Moby-Dick to the Present* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press 1988) p.5

awakening power' upon his mind as a boy.<sup>3</sup> As Thomas Philbrick, the chief authority on Cooper's sea fiction maintains, 'it seems unlikely that *Moby-Dick* could have attained its present form' if Cooper had not liberated 'the fictional treatment of the sea from the satirical tone of Sir Tobias Smollett'.<sup>4</sup> Wayne Franklin maintains that Cooper's sea fiction serves as his 'most innovative work as a writer'.<sup>5</sup> Before Cooper, the sea in literature usually served as a 'backdrop for essentially social or moral action'; in contrast Cooper 'understood it both as a realm of human action and as a physical system full of potential emotional meaning'.<sup>6</sup> In *Robinson Crusoe* for example, the great length of time and effort that is the ocean voyage is characteristically written off in a single sentence, with the nucleus of interest being confined upon the land.<sup>7</sup> In Cooper's work however, navigating any particular body of water is an exact science executed in the face of uncertain natural forces and the constant threat of impending wreckage and watery graves, where each minute threatens new dangers. At the beginning of *The Pilot* we are witness to Barnstable and Griffith traversing a dangerous area of water made all the more treacherous by the unknown underwater geography of the ocean floor. Notably, this is hardly a grand stretch of ocean; it is a heavily localised setting off the coast of Northumberland.

Despite such lofty recommendations from Melville and Conrad, as well as countless others, it may still come as a surprise to the scholar of American literature that James Fenimore Cooper, the great American novelist most commonly celebrated for the adventures of Natty Bumppo as chronicled within the five books of *The Leather Stocking Tales*, was also the inventor of the American sea novel. Critical analysis of Cooper's frontier fiction has greatly overshadowed his sea fiction

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<sup>3</sup> Extract from Melville's letter to the Cooper Memorial Committee (Memorial of Cooper), *James Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage* (Routledge & Kegan Paul London and Boston)p.244 -- During Cooper's lifetime, Melville had written favourable reviews of both *The Red Rover* and *The Sea Lions*.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Philbrick: *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press Cambridge 1961) p.264 -- Philbrick's work still very much stands as the most extensive analysis of Cooper's entire nautical canon.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Franklin: *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press 2007) p.xxiii

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* p.xxv-xxvi

<sup>7</sup> Arriving in Brazil: 'We had a very good voyage to the Brazils, and I arrived in the Bay de Todos los Santos, or All Saints' Bay in about twenty-two days'. Daniel Defoe *Robinson Crusoe* (Elecbook 2001 first published in 1719) p.44.

throughout the years, despite the fact that during the course of a lucrative yet tempestuous literary career Cooper wrote no less than twelve sea novels.<sup>8</sup> Despite their 'convincing and unflagging' interest, Conrad found it saddening that his sea tales and their wealth of characters such as *The Pilot*'s Long Tom Coffin must inevitably 'pass away some day and be utterly forgotten'. Luckily, Cooper's sea fiction has not been completely forgotten. Most recently, Margaret Cohen through her analysis of *The Pilot*, illuminates the extensive influence of Cooper's invention of the sea novel, or how the ready-made themes of the genre were easily translatable and transportable across international boundaries and utilised by Frederick Marryat in England and Eugène Sue in France.<sup>9</sup> Jason Berger too, has discussed the importance of further study of Cooper's sea fiction, particularly his early nautical romances because they deal with the broader implications of the 'vexed relationship between labour, class and national identity' that were apparent in the US during the early nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Cohen understands the usefulness of Cooper for mapping the codes of the historical romance to the supranational space of the ocean.<sup>11</sup> The supranational is a word usually connected to forms of multinational government; specifically, when the European Union was founded in 1951 it was labelled the 'first supranational institution' whereby the central basis of power overarches national boundaries, authorities and interests. In Cohen's case, the supranational applies to the study of literary genres or how the poetics of a genre transcend the constraints of national boundaries to become something universally recognised and recycled across the globe. Cohen uses 'homeless Odysseus' as the primary archetype who demonstrates the poetics of sea fiction, the travel genre

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<sup>8</sup> There seem to be discrepancies between critics over how many sea novels Cooper actually wrote. The common consensus (from Philbrick) is that he wrote twelve (as well as a history of the US navy), *The Pilot* (1824), *The Red Rover* (1827), *The Water-Witch* (1830), *The Monikins* (1835), *Homeward Bound* (1838), *Mercedes of Castile* (1840), *The Two Admirals* (1842), *The Wing-and-Wing* (1842), *Afloat and Ashore* (1842), *Miles Wallingford* (1842), *Jack Tier* (1848), *The Sea Lions* (1849). Warren S. Walker discounts *The Monikins* as a nautical novel and counts it as a satire. Wayne Franklin counts fifteen, including *The Bravo* (1832) as a genuine sea novel.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Cohen 'Travelling Genres' *New Literary History* Vol.34 No.4 (2007) pp.481-499

<sup>10</sup> Jason Berger 'Killing Tom Coffin: Rethinking the Nationalist Narrative in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot*,' *Early American Literature*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2008) p.643.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Cohen 'Travelling Genres' p.483

and perhaps even the novelistic trend in general. The King of Ithica represents the key fascination of novels with characters 'who refuse to stay at home'; adopting instead, a life of grand adventure across a wider world of infinite possibility and promise.<sup>12</sup> We could easily apply these poetics to any number of literary characters, Natty Bumppo being Cooper's finest example of course. Essentially, there are inherent similarities between the forest and the ocean in Cooper's work, both are defined by nature on a grand scale and both require skill and knowledge to successfully traverse. However the forest is part of the landscape, which is part of a nation, or at least a colonial power, in contrast to the ocean which is a dynamic force that does not belong to any one nation. In *Moby-Dick*, when Ishmael sits aloft at the mast head he communicates a sense of landless wonder that levels any kind of personal identity that might have persisted on the mainland.<sup>13</sup> Simply, the supranational becomes a byword defining the ocean as a place of both extensive natural and spiritual power that breathes life into the highly romanticised mythical life of the sailor as an individual.<sup>14</sup> In Cooper's novels, the supranational ocean forms the backbone of the narrative, from which stems the elevated socio-political role of the mariner, which allows the principles of the revolutionary era to flourish. As Philbrick affirms, from the beginnings of the American Revolution right through to the golden age of American shipping in the 1830s, the American frontier was primarily based at sea, thereby creating the sailor as a key figure of American freedom and independence.

Commonly, the archetype of the sailor creates a romantic portrait of a man surviving against overwhelming odds, the supranationally packaged poetics that Cohen refers to. Familiar archetypes include the wayward wandering soul, like Coleridge's ancient mariner or some other nameless Ishmael or Robinson Crusoe, jaded and running from the common civilities of landed life for a life of

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Cohen 'Travelling Genres' p.481

<sup>13</sup> 'a sublime uneventfulness invests you; you hear no news; read no gazettes; extras with startling accounts of commonplaces never delude you into unnecessary excitements; you hear of no domestic afflictions; bankrupt securities; fall of stocks; are never troubled with the thought of what you shall have for dinner – for all your meals for three years and more are snugly stowed in casks, and your bill of fare is immutable' Melville *Moby-Dick* 1851 (NY, Penguin Classics 2003)

<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Jason Berger uses the word extranational to describe the character of Tom Coffin in *The Pilot*, a common sailor character whose situation and experience at sea grant him a certain degree of promotion over people of the same social class that reside on the land. 'Killing Tom Coffin' p.653

adventure and meditation upon the mighty deep. The mythic life of the sailor is something that often appears fantastical and fascinating to the land dweller especially with the excursions to new and distant lands. Indeed Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* with its themes of 'hollow earth' capitalises upon this notion, as do *Typee*, *Omoo* and *Mardi*; the successful travel narratives that define Melville's early career. Cooper was a sailor himself, and as an author he clearly understands the romantic perception of the sailor as a figure of freedom of movement but he also understands him as a figure of intense nationalist fervour and sometimes this can be problematic to the narrative he builds. The mythical land lubbing life of the common sailor is something that is rudimentarily opposed to the formation of nations, though he forms a part of the community of the ship itself. We may of course see the ship as a microcosm of the nation it sails under; for Cooper at least, the American ship is a bastion of forward thinking revolutionary principles. Indeed this, according to Philbrick was the basis of Cooper's maritime nationalism – Cooper used the trials and tribulations of the 'American' ship in attempt to unify the divided American people of the 1820s.

From a historical perspective, the sailor in the American Revolutionary context was a reactionary and problematic figure in the face of British oppression. As Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker explain in their history of the Revolutionary Atlantic, *The Many Headed Hydra*, Atlantic modernity and capitalism was defined by the trade routes between Europe, Africa and America. The rise of shipping led the British Empire to apply greater control of law and order over the seas, a task that was only met with increased piracy, mutiny, rebellion and finally revolution.<sup>15</sup> In the years before the American Revolution, Linebaugh and Rediker identify 'the motley crew' as the primary driving force of rebellion.

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<sup>15</sup> The Hydra analogy refers to the twelfth labour of Hercules, in which the Greek hero was tasked with killing the mythical beast with nine heads. The difficulty with killing the beast lay in the fact that dismembering one of the heads resulted in the growth of two more in its place. Hercules, at least was successful with dealing with the Hydra by burning the open wound before the two heads could grow. With the beginning of British colonial expansion the hydra analogy was used to describe 'the difficulty of imposing order on increasingly global systems of labour'. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker *The Many Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London, Verso 2000) p3.



Operations on sea and land, from mutiny and insurrection, made the motley crew the driving force of a revolutionary crisis in the 1760s and 1770s. Such actions helped to destabilize imperial civil society and pushed America toward the world's first modern colonial war for liberation. By energizing and leading the movement from below, the motley crew shaped the social, organizational, and intellectual histories of the era and demonstrated that the American Revolution was neither an elite nor a national event, since its genesis, process, outcome, and influence all depended on the circulation of proletarian experience around the Atlantic.<sup>16</sup>

The motley crew represented a multi-ethnic division of manual labourers collected in the spirit of the urban mob and united by their purpose and social situation upon the deck. These crews were started by and comprised of sailors, whose ardent militancy dictated by their 'daily work experience' upon the ocean combined with their 'co-ordinated cooperation and daring initiative' meant they were more developed towards the art of rebellion than most other sects of society.<sup>17</sup> Linebaugh and Rediker go into greater detail on the activities perpetrated by American sailors particularly within port towns on both sides of the Atlantic in the years leading up to the revolution. These ranged from civil disobedience in protest against the Stamp Act in 1765, to the myriad acts of violence towards British press gangers beginning as early as 1739 and lasting right until the War of Independence. American sailors were continuously harassed by the British even after the Revolutionary War. Indeed, it was the impressment of American sailors that led to the War of 1812. As well as being actively involved in rebellion against the British, American sailors were perhaps one of the prime victims of the injustices of the British Empire.

The American mariner's opposition to the British Empire is central to the focus of Cooper's first three sea romances. In reverse order, we can easily trace the development of maritime

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<sup>16</sup> *The Many-Headed Hydra* p.212

<sup>17</sup> *ibid* p.214

Anglophobia. *The Water Witch* for example, deals with the practice of smuggling in the face of harsh trading laws imposed by the British during the 1710s. *The Red Rover* centres upon the more violent practice of piracy in 1759. Finally *The Pilot* deals exclusively with rebellion, as American naval forces take the Revolutionary War to British shores. Aversion towards the British is undoubtedly the common denominator of Cooper's books; and whilst, as I intend to demonstrate within this thesis, Cooper's novels recognise this influence from the lower ranks of the deck through a handful of colourful characters he is more preoccupied with the heroic maintenance of the higher strata of seaboard society who are more characteristic of his own social standing.

The sentiment of his early sea novels undoubtedly convey the patriotic though idealistic optimism of the republican spirit, driven by the nation's maritime ventures, but more importantly, there can also be traced a wariness of what America was becoming through a revolution instigated partly by mob rule and a deep seated class based angst. The War of 1812 may have been the death knell for the Federalist Party, but this is not to the detriment of the fact that Cooper was clearly a man who believed in a greater need for law and order over the masses. Ultimately, Cooper abhorred barbarism, be it exercised by the British Navy or the motley crew. As a middle class man, Cooper believes in maintaining a degree of civility even in the most harrowing of situations. In essence, Cooper's novels display concerns that were common of the transatlantic literature of the period. As Julia Stern argues that of the early American novel it lies in between, it is a situation that lies in between the transparency of Rousseau's writings on the natural benevolence of mankind, and the threatening opacity or 'haunted glass' as demonstrated by Burke's reflections of the French Revolution.<sup>18</sup>

Cooper was, as George Dekker maintains, 'an American author of decidedly republican persuasion, who insisted upon the worth and usability of American materials,' but chose the historical romance 'a form created by [Sir Walter Scott], and one which clearly seemed dependent

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<sup>18</sup> Julia Stern *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the early American Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1997) p.7

upon the complex, cultural wealth of the European past' as his structure.<sup>19</sup> As Cohen states, the focus of Scott's form is 'the education of a virtuous but in no way exceptional protagonist into the "middle-way," between social responsibility and personal freedom'.<sup>20</sup> The same can be said for Cooper, where his 'middle heroes' come to represent moderation and civility within the highly masculine construct of the ship.<sup>21</sup> We may liken Cooper himself and his genteel sailors to the character of Jack Case from Melville's *White-Jacket*. As Melville is quick to point out 'Jack was a gentleman' of British descent, polite and courteous with 'none of the boisterousness so common to tars' and of course well versed in Byron 'and all the romances of Scott'.<sup>22</sup> As Donald Darnell points out, the majority of Cooper's historical romances are preoccupied with the preservation of wealth and the well being of the genteel character.<sup>23</sup> Above all the notion of 'know your place' prevails throughout Cooper's novels, he 'judges his characters by how closely they adhere to this doctrine, and in the process he establishes the criteria by which a lady and a gentleman are identified'.<sup>24</sup> As a result, there can be traced a clash between social classes within Cooper's sea novels, between the preferences of middle/upper class gentility and the chaos of mob rule, connecting to a persistent Anglophilia, which Elisa Tamarkin defines as 'a fetish and a nostalgia' for British society and culture in the face of social transition that the American revolution entails.<sup>25</sup>

Nothing demonstrates this clash better than the very name of the genre itself. As Hugh Egan establishes, the 'sea novel' can be perceived to be 'a contradiction in terms, for those very elements

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<sup>20</sup> Margaret Cohen 'Travelling Genres' p.484

<sup>21</sup> The term 'middle hero' is often used in describing the youthful though high ranking characters that comprise the upper ranks of the ship. Hugh Egan defines the middle hero as 'a young man divided at heart between the love of a woman and a love of the sea', but it is probably more accurate to say that they serve only to anchor the tale with a sense of familiarity and civility to the middle/upper class reader. It should be emphasised that in the end, Cooper's middle heroes *always* choose the love of their woman over the sea. Hugh Egan 'Cooper and his Contemporaries' in *America and the Sea: A Literary History* ed. by Haskell Springer (Athens and London, The University of Georgia Press 1995) p.69

<sup>22</sup> Melville *White-Jacket or the World in a Man-Of-War* (London, Oxford University Press 1966) p.14 It should also be noted that the 'tars' Melville refers to are the Jack Tars, a name commonly attached to common sailors.

<sup>23</sup> Donald Darnell 'Cooper's Problematic Pilot: "Unrighteous Ambition" in a Patriotic Cause' in *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art* no.1 (1989) pp. 135-142

<sup>24</sup> Ibid p. 135

<sup>25</sup> Elisa Tamarkin *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion and Antebellum America* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press 2008) p.xxiv

that make a novel seaworthy', the sense of landlessness, the nautical technicalities and isolation within a highly masculine environment, 'work against it being a novel at all- at least one in the British tradition with which Cooper was familiar'.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Margaret Cohen has also pointed to the inherent contradiction of the phrase 'sea romance' since the word romance implies a reconfiguration of the established world 'in such a way as to restore the conditions of some lost Eden, or to anticipate a future realm from which the old mortality and imperfections will have been effaced,' whilst Cooper's sea can complicate such notions with an emphasis on strict nautical conduct and manual labour.<sup>27</sup> John Peck argues that the novelistic medium is ultimately a bourgeois construct that is 'overwhelmingly concerned with the material conditions of daily life' but whose very presence is dictated by a vibrant economy that real life maritime venture provided. Therefore, 'it was the feeling of security provided by the country's navy and the prosperity created by maritime trade that made possible such a rich and domestic life'.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the novel itself can be seen as a product of the sea.

There had been writers of the sea before Cooper of course. During the Revolutionary war, Philip Freneau had written poems based upon his own experience at sea, infused with both an eye for nautical realism as well as a heavy degree of American patriotism. The pinnacle of his writing, *The British Prison Ship* (1781) was written after Freneau himself was incarcerated aboard the British ship *Scorpion*. The poem illustrates the cruelty with which the British treated their prisoners, the kind of unjust brutality Cooper clearly abhorred and used as the basis of the Anglophobia in his own novels.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Egan 'Cooper and his Contemporaries' in *America and the Sea: A Literary History* ed. by Haskell Springer (Athens and London, The University of Georgia Press 1995) p.67

<sup>27</sup> Fredric Jameson *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca N.Y 1981) p.110

<sup>28</sup> John Peck *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels 1719-1917* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave MacMillan 2001) p.2

<sup>29</sup> An excerpt reads: 'Conveyed to York we found, at length, too late/That death was better than the prisoner's fate/There doomed to famine, shackles and despair/Condemned to breathe a foul, infected air/In sickly hulks, devoted where we lay/Successful funerals gloomed each dismal day.' Philip Freneau 'The British Prison Ship' In *The Poems of Philip Freneau: Written chiefly during the late war* (Philadelphia MDCCLXXXVI 1786) p.192

The literary era in which Cooper wrote was largely defined by the romance of Scott and Byron, who had both used the ocean as a setting at some point. Indeed, Cooper's conception of the ocean is frequently likened to Byron where the sea takes on a life of its own, effectively becoming a character in its own right. Byron's *The Corsair* (1814) established the archetype of the Byronic Pirate, a ruthless seagoing commanding presence of high romantic charge and questionable moral footing. Part of the appeal of Byron, particularly in *The Corsair*, was that the main character, Conrad, held similarities that were tied with the larger than life personality of the author himself. Scott on the other hand had written *The Pirate* as a tale of the sea, but with glaring irregularities regarding the methods and observation of nautical practice; Cooper felt it was his duty to write *The Pilot* as a corrective.<sup>30</sup> Specifically on the genre of sea fiction, Smollett was perhaps the most prestigious author that made his reputation as a writer of the sea. Indeed, it was from reading Smollett that Scott gained the knowledge on how to write his own sea scenes for *The Pirate*. Smollett's picaresque novels, particularly *The Adventures of Roderick Random* included nautical scenes invested with the wealth of Smollett's own experience as a shipboard surgeon.<sup>31</sup> Smollett clearly saw the ship as a haven for lower class reprobates, outcasts who having no place on land find a place at sea.

As Peck maintains, the basic difference between British and American sea fiction lies in a different sense of space. Drawing on a rich cultural history, the British novel 'is always aware of a complex social inheritance', whilst the American novel 'is the product of, and reflection of, a country still in the process of formation'. As a result, whilst the British maritime novel 'dwells on family

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<sup>30</sup> First published in 1822, *The Pirate* is set in the Shetland Islands in the early Eighteenth Century. The pirate captain of the novel's title is a one Clement Cleveland, who is shipwrecked along the coast, saved by the novel's young hero Mordaut Mertoun. Initially, it is not known that Cleveland is a wanted pirate, but Mertoun soon strikes up a bitter rivalry with the character when he threatens his romantic attachment to Brenda Troil and her family. The Troil family are kidnapped by the pirate but are eventually freed when the ship is encountered by the HMS Halcyon. The novel ends with the marriage of Brenda and Mordaut, and Cleveland's subsequent redemption as he enlists within the King's navy.

<sup>31</sup> Roderick Random is born out of an illicit relationship between a noble man and a lower class woman. Shunned by his father after his mother's death and possessing little or no money, Roderick undergoes a life at sea, represented by a series of adventures and misadventures as he tries to con rich women into giving him money. Ultimately he is revealed to be of noble birth by the novel's conclusion and is married off to the object of his affections after securing a large fortune.

connections and social structures, the American maritime novel focuses more on isolated individuals, heroes on the edge of a new frontier'. These differences rely upon spatial differences, or how the British sea novel reflects 'a small island where people live in close proximity' whilst the American sea novel 'can feel boundless; the distances covered are enormous, and the time spent away from land is lengthy. As a result, British sea novels never seem to offer 'a similar sense of remoteness'.<sup>32</sup>

Whilst these binaries may illustrate the differences between Melville and Smollett, it is clear that Cooper's early sea novels exist in-between these two binaries, as a product of the transatlantic space, not yet fully independent from English literary convention. Through the administration of the conventions of the historical romance, Cooper's sea tales are preoccupied with fulfilling a national narrative and the definition of the United States through the growth of resistance located at sea to overpower the oppression of British rule. At the same time, the national narrative is nearly always complicated by the supranational aspect of oceanic practice and transit. As a way of connecting the two themes, Cohen defines Cooper's seanovels as establishing a romance of labour, 'restoring the integrity of work and envisioning a new classless society founded on the ethos of work'.<sup>33</sup> The sailor's life is defined by the struggle for survival in a challenging environment, and it is through this that characters of a lower class earn a more prominent role within the sea novel as a result of their skill and ability. The nature of work, as Cohen states, 'along with the status of the worker, are among the most urgent social questions of the nineteenth century in the advanced capitalist nations of the world where sea fiction flourished'.<sup>34</sup> Reflecting this, the narrative of the historical romance may be centred upon one of Cooper's genteel naval officers, but the novels also grant a greater role of heroism for characters of lowlier social status such as Tom Coffin in *The Pilot* and the black sailor Scipio Africanus in *The Red Rover*. Cooper's strict adherence to precise naval conduct is an example of an entire crew working together to successfully combat the elements.

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid* p.89

<sup>33</sup> Margaret Cohen 'Traveling Genres' p.493

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* p.491

Each chapter within this thesis will seek to analyse each novel independently with a focus upon the shipboard relationships between Britain and America, the upper ranks and the lower ranks, the land lovers and the land lubbers, the supranational elements of sea fiction to the strict confines of the nationalist narrative. In the first chapter, examining *The Pilot*, the main point of my argument is that Cooper's first sea romance can be regarded as a book more identifiably English in style and sensibilities than American, through its concentration upon the higher ranks. Directly inspired by, but also seeking to challenge and even mimic conventional English literature, namely Walter Scott's *The Pirate*, the novel is confined to the coast of Northumbria, 'sharing Scott's reluctance to leave the shore'.<sup>35</sup> This is not to say that the novel is devoid of the supranational element. Through the literary creation of the coxswain Old Tom Coffin, Cooper fuses a working class hero rich with the mythical life of the mariner. As Berger argues, Coffin, attains an elevation of such heroic stature that he poses a problem to the very nationalist narrative Cooper intends to carry out. This results in Cooper's rather reluctant decision to kill the character off suddenly midway through the novel, arguably to the detriment of the novel's entertainment value. In direct contrast to Coffin, I shall discuss the portrayal of John Paul Jones through the novel's title character, the mysterious pilot known as Mr Gray. In attempting to create an American hero, Gray becomes a product of a new wrathful form of tyranny and so represents Cooper's wariness of the nation's development through revolution. At the same time, the pilot is infused with a certain landlessness that makes him a romantic figure that is typical of the supranational convention, but as we shall see, this also works against him, making him into a kind of monster.

The second chapter will focus upon *The Red Rover*, Cooper's second novel, which already begins to feel more 'American' as it is set in Newport, Rhode Island, as well as the truly vast expanse of the Atlantic. *The Red Rover* is set in 1759, yet despite the historical setting, Cooper's sea tale is imbued with a sense of revolutionary feeling and a nationalist narrative that builds towards the War

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Philbrick *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* p.54

of Independence in an important final scene. This chapter deals exclusively with the quest for both an individual identity for its heroes as well as a national identity perhaps more faithfully than *The Pilot*. Captain Heidegger, like Mr Gray before him, functions as an imposing character representing the dualism invested within the American yearning for political independence; he has a belief in the ideological notions of liberty and freedom coupled with a violent and wrathful sense of vengeance to be perpetrated against the British. Discussion will also cover the multi-racial pairing of Dick Fid and Scipio Africanus, the latter being an interesting figure of study especially since he is, as a sailor, an early African American hero. What I hope to show in this chapter is that whilst *The Red Rover's* 'Americanness' is more obvious, certainly more so than *The Pilot*, there is still very much a prevailing sense of attachment to English convention in the midst of the enlarged supranational space and an uneasy wariness of what America society was becoming, which is defined largely by the aggressive masculinity of the Rover.

The third and final chapter will look at *The Water Witch*. The novel is set further back in American history, in the 1710s, but again contains a similar plot exemplifying the need for political independence in a pre-revolutionary society, represented through the illegal activity of an alliance of Dutch traders and a motley band of smugglers belonging to the uncatchable brigantine known as The Water Witch. Furthermore, whilst the previous novels are inhabited by a plethora of highly masculine characters, *The Water Witch* has a notable elevation of the heroine as represented by Master Seadrift. More than this however, *The Water Witch* seems intent on complicating the common gender binaries which are usually, in the masculine environment of the ship at sea, more straightforwardly presented. Tiller fulfils the role of Gray and Heidegger without the uglier shades of wrath and violence, demonstrating a submission to marital union without reverting to the safety of a domestic environment. In many ways, Tiller is Cooper's fullest development of the romantic American sailor.

In writing his sea tales, Cooper began a literary revolution of his own. As Philbrick maintains, Cooper's first three sea romances form a trilogy linked by a sense of epic unity where the 'free and



daring life of the sea becomes equated with the promise of political identity and liberty, as if the values of the seaman's calling necessitated the eventual self realization of a people so thoroughly maritime as the Americans'.<sup>36</sup> He created a template for a genre that would represent the foundation for many future sea writers. It is the formation of this genre through its initial development through Cooper's trilogy of nautical romances that is complicated by the author's attachment to the conventional approach to literature as dominated at this point by England. The focus of this thesis is to examine this area of transatlantic flux that is so invested and identifiable in Cooper's early sea romances, thereby providing a deeper understanding of a neglected but crucial aspect of early American literature.

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<sup>36</sup> Philbrick *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* p.58

## Chapter 1.

### *The Pilot: A Sense of Englishness.*

'Intrepid, unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilised in externals but a savage at heart, America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations.'

Herman Melville *Israel Potter* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1957) p.170

"We wait for you, Mr Gray."

James Fenimore Cooper *The Pilot* (Printed in the UK by Lightning source, Dodo Press, 2007)p.77

Before moving into analysis of *The Pilot*, it is necessary to determine James Fenimore Cooper's own maritime background, since this reveals the importance of the ocean to the author's literary imagination. Philbrick has suggested that Cooper's 1827 novel *The Prairie* is in fact 'a sea novel in disguise' since it shares thematically many similarities with Cooper's nautical trilogy.<sup>1</sup> As Luis Inglesias states, his very description of the prairies are imagined with oceanic metaphors:

His epic description of the prairies as "not unlike the ocean, when its restless waters are heaving heavily, after the agitation and fury of the tempest have begun to lessen," reveals not only Cooper's conceptual framework but also his appreciation of the environment in terms of the dynamic seas. Finding it "unnecessary to warn the practiced reader" of the "sameness of the surface landscape" between the western prairies and the Atlantic, Cooper used oceanic metaphors cognizant of a readership more familiar with a maritime world than a frontier experience.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Philbrick 'Cooper and the Literary Discovery of the Sea' in *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art* ed. by George A. Test (State University of New York College 1991) p.18

<sup>2</sup> Inglesias quotes from *The Prairie: A Tale* (Albany, NY: SUNY press, 1985) p.14-15 in his article 'The "Keen eyed critic of the sea": James Fenimore Cooper's Invention of the Sea Novel' in *James Fenimore Cooper Society Miscellaneous Papers* No.23 (2006) p.1-7

Cooper had never visited the prairies and so used his extensive experience upon the ocean to depict the vast open space of the American Western frontier. The simple fact of the matter was that, prior to 1850, the American frontier *was based* upon the ocean, and it was this frontier that Cooper properly understood. Whilst Westward expansion is defined by the expansive growth of industry and travel, or the excessive attainment of land in pursuit of the manifest destiny, the maritime frontier though lucrative grew in the shadow of the overwhelming power of the British navy. As Peck attests, the maritime frontier nursed a capitalist initiative in the early Republic as the American navy were forced to compete against British superiority. Yankee whale ships enforced the notion that Americans could go anywhere, literally probing every ocean on the planet in search for the hunt of sperm whales. This led some British commentators to commend American efforts but it did not suppress the oppressive instincts of the British Empire which was at war with France.<sup>3</sup> The British Navy continued to capture American ships and sailors long after the Revolutionary War, leading to what is commonly referred to as the Second War of Independence: the War of 1812. As Philbrick notes, ‘the cumulative effect of the history of maritime enterprise in colonial America’ was measured largely in success: ‘from the naval victories of the Revolution, the undeclared naval war with France, and the war with the Barbary States; the steady expansion of American trade throughout the world in the early years of the new republic; and above all the astounding naval success of the War of 1812’. Of course Cooper himself was aware of this more than most, the ocean having a prominent lure in his years as a young adult.<sup>4</sup>

In the grand tradition of the greatest sea writers, Cooper had extensive experience of the ship and the ocean. In the autumn of 1806 up until the winter of 1807, Cooper sailed aboard the merchant ship *Stirling*, traversing both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. As Franklin maintains, Cooper went to sea ‘a well connected man with a landed identity that would give him special status on board’, thereby holding a similar position to his own genteel literary creations.<sup>5</sup> It was a voyage

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<sup>3</sup> Edmund Burke’s ‘glowing eulogy’ of the American fisheries.

<sup>4</sup> Philbrick *The Development of American Sea Fiction* p.1

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Franklin ‘Cooper as Passenger’ in *The American Neptune* Vol.57 No.4 (1997) (p.351-357) p.353

in which Cooper earned the title of midshipman as well as the friendship of Ned Myers who would become the subject of a biography in 1843: *Ned Myers; or, A Life Before The Mast*.<sup>6</sup> The build up to the War of 1812, most notably the incident involving the *Chesapeake* and the *HMS Leopard* in 1807, did much to incite the young midshipman to enrol within the ranks of the United States Navy. After refusing to give up suspected deserters, the *Chesapeake* was fired upon, sustaining great damage, as well as three dead and twenty-six wounded. Franklin maintains that this act of unlawful violence committed by the British had a profound effect upon Cooper's own political feelings. 'Never again was he to view the land of his family's origins, imagined in earlier years with a soft focus, as a kind of second home', from now on he regarded 'England and the English with perpetual suspicion'. Put simply, 'when the Leopard fired on the Chesapeake, it fired indirectly on James Cooper, and he now prepared himself to fire back' taking 'the long non-war leading up to 1812 very personally'.<sup>7</sup>

This anti-English feeling is demonstrated through his review of Washington Irving's *Bracebridge Hall*, in which he criticises the author for sympathising with the English aristocracy:

While he proudly, and no doubt sincerely declares, his increasing attachment to republican principles, he eulogises the aristocracy of Great Britain; descants upon the dignity of descent, and the generous pride of illustrious ancestry! The glorious freedom of the British constitution, is prudently admired, and the great body of the English people are timely and judiciously praised.<sup>8</sup>

Cooper himself was no champion of the common people however. As a member of polite society, it is perhaps unfair to describe Cooper as aristocratic, but he certainly was an elitist. As an author,

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<sup>6</sup> In Wayne Franklin's invaluable biography of Cooper, he goes to great lengths to describe the young author's voyage aboard the *Stirling* (though it is probably also benefited from a reading of *Ned Myers; or, A Life Before the Mast*) as well as his ventures as midshipman.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Franklin *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press 2007) p.108

<sup>8</sup> James Fenimore Cooper's anonymous writing for the *Repository* in 1822 - *Early Critical Essays (1820-1822)* ed. by James Franklin Beard (Gainesville, Fla 1955) p.140

Cooper believed he had a role in educating the American people as he reveals in a letter to Richard Henry Dana Sr:

“If I am able to create an excitement that may rouse the sleeping talents of the nation, and in some measure clear us from the odium of dullness... I should not have labored entirely in vain.”<sup>9</sup>

Through his literature Cooper, like the protagonists of his novels, yearned to establish a sense of American identity that was based upon civility and moderation. Cooper’s ships are kept in check by a fair and wide range of middle and upper class personalities. As Melville says in *White-Jacket*, a ship requires ‘the necessity of precision and discipline’, without these regulations imposed by a strict commanding presence ‘the man-of-war’s crew would be nothing but a mob’, thusly we can see how Cooper may have seen the ship as a way of illustrating how the United States should be governed.<sup>10</sup> Coupled with his admiration and belief in American maritime endeavour and the competitive motivation to better the established literary world, defined by British writers such as Sir Walter Scott, he would write *The Pilot*.

The idea for *The Pilot* came out of a discussion of Scott’s *The Pirate* around the table of Cooper’s close friend Charles Wilkes as Susan Fenimore Cooper reveals:

The author of *Waverley* had recently published “*The Pirate*,” and, as usual with every fresh volume from his pen, the book and its characters entered largely into the table talk of the hour. The admiration of the landsmen of the party was much excited by the nautical passages of the narrative; and some of the guests doubted whether Sir Walter Scott, the legal man, the poet of past centuries, could have drawn marine touches so

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<sup>9</sup> James Fenimore Cooper, Letter of 14<sup>th</sup> April 1823, to Richard Henry Dana (Sr.) Letters and Journals ed. by James Franklin Beard Vol.1 (NY, The Belknap Press of Harvard University 1960) p.94

<sup>10</sup> Herman Melville *White Jacket or The World in a Man-of-War* 1850 (London, Oxford University Press 1966)p.7-8

correctly; the fact was given as a reason for doubting his identity with the author of *Waverley*. No man admired the genius of Sir Walter Scott more than the author of "The Pioneers;" but on this occasion he maintained the opinion that "The Pirate" was not thoroughly satisfactory to a nautical reader; he added that a man accustomed to ships, and the sea, could have accomplished far more with the same materials as those employed in "The Pirate."<sup>11</sup>

By writing this sea tale, Cooper aimed 'to show what can be done in this way by a sailor'. Merging history, with its proven commercial viability with contemporary audiences, and a new realistic treatment of nautical action was the genesis of *The Pilot*. As Margaret Cohen enthuses, Cooper invented the sea novel with *The Pilot* taking 'the codes of historical fiction, pioneered by Sir Walter Scott, to map the boundaries and identity of the nation, and [translating] them to the supranational space of the open ocean'.<sup>12</sup> *The Pilot* is quite obviously a romance of Scott's *Waverly* model, a style which Cooper mimicked throughout much of his career, earning him much of his worldwide success as well as his much abhorred nickname 'The American Scott'. Just as Scott used the Jacobite rebellion as the backdrop for *Waverly*, *The Pilot* uses the War of Independence as its respective historical situation. The very structure of the popular historical romance provides the foundation for a nationalist narrative, as John Peck says, in looking to the past the novelist attempts to define the

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<sup>11</sup> James Fenimore Cooper as quoted from *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper, with Notes by Susan Fenimore Cooper* (New York, W.A, Townsend and Co. 1861) p.72 In 1861, 25 of Cooper's novels were republished with his daughter Susan Fenimore Cooper writing new prefaces entitled the *Pages and Pictures from the writings of James Fenimore Cooper*. Between the years 1876-1884, 15 more novels were republished as part of the *Household Edition* again containing new prefaces created by his daughter. These prefaces are notable for including valuable previously unseen biographical material. Until recently with the biographical work carried out by Beard and Franklin, Cooper's private family papers have largely been withheld from scholarly analysis. Cooper's family; anxious over the possible encounter of a critical backlash over the novelist's work and personal character are usually thought as being the reason why. Franklin's biography is the first real biography of James Fenimore Cooper that has been given prominent access to the family papers. All of Susan Fenimore Cooper's introductions can be found upon the James Fenimore Cooper Society Website (<http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/>).

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Cohen, 'Travelling Genres' published in *New Literary History*, Volume 38, Number 3, Summer 2003 (p.481-499) p.483

present.<sup>13</sup> Cooper was constantly excavating American history in such a way as to legitimate the nation's experience culturally, be this through the maritime frontier or the Seven Years War, which is used in *The Last of the Mohicans*. The very nature of his Revolutionary setting establishes a sense of American history that is inherently linked to Great Britain. Ultimately, in inaugurating the American tradition of the sea novel, we shall see how *The Pilot* sacrifices the supranational dimension for the fulfilment of the historical plot and the sanctity of its genteel middle heroes. Although *The Pilot* is quite obviously a novel that grapples with the concept of establishing American nationhood it is also blatantly aware of a complex social inheritance that comes with the division between the two nations during the War of Independence.

Originally published in New York on the 29<sup>th</sup> December 1823, *The Pilot* is set during the War of Independence off the coast of Northumberland, and essentially serves as a tale of espionage. The pilot of the novel's title is a fictionalisation of John Paul Jones, the US navy's first legitimate hero. In 1777, Congress gave Jones command of the *Ranger*. Effectively sent to work as a privateer, he quickly gained the reputation in England as a feared pirate, a small but worrying threat that challenged British naval superiority within British waters.<sup>14</sup> 'Jones had three objectives,' as Stephen Howarth says: 'to take any available prizes, to raid some part of Britain's coast; and to capture as many prisoners as possible in order to exchange them for American prisoners in British jails'.<sup>15</sup> In 1778 he successfully captured the HMS Drake which was the first victory of an American vessel in British waters. *The Pilot* is set twelve years before Jones's death during the winter of 1780, where his nautical expertise is utilised once again to aid the American war effort.

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<sup>13</sup> John Peck *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels 1719-1917* p.152

<sup>14</sup> To clarify, a privateer is a privately owned warship commissioned to attack enemy vessels during wartime. 'Congress and the different colonies gave "letters of marque" – license to seize enemy ships – to about 2,000 privateers during the Revolutionary War. The privateers aided the war effort, seizing so many British ships that they drove up insurance rates in London.' Evan Thomas *John Paul Jones: Sailor, Hero, Father of the American Navy* (New York, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks 2003) p.68

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Howarth *To Shining Sea: A History of the United States Navy 1775-1991* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991) p.26

'A single glance at the map' as Cooper declares in the opening sentence of *The Pilot*, 'will make the reader acquainted with the position of the eastern coast of the Island of Great Britain'.<sup>16</sup> Cooper instantly locates the reader (where ever they may be) in the time and setting of the novel. The novel begins with the arrival of an American frigate (commanded by Captain Munson) and her supporting schooner (the *Ariel*) off the coast of Northumbria as witnessed from shore by a collection of Scottish and Irish labourers.<sup>17</sup> Sending two smaller whale boats to shore, we are introduced to the novel's middle heroes, Lieutenants Henry Griffith and Richard Barnstable, who are tasked with collecting the pilot. When they reach land, we are also introduced to Tom Coffin, a whaler (of unprecedented skill) by profession and also a colourful maritime eccentric who is literally born of the ocean.

Upon meeting the pilot, the party encounter a disguised stranger who reveals herself to be none other than Barnstable's romantic counterpart, Katherine Plowden. She informs the party of her informal imprisonment by her uncle Colonel Howard in St Ruth's Abbey. We learn also that Griffith's respective love interest Cecilia Howard is also being held within the confines of the Colonel's abode. Obviously this makes the military campaign all the more personal. From here, the gathering splits up, Katherine must return to St Ruth before her absence arouses suspicion and the party must also return to their ships and come together with a plan.

The novel functions as a typical adventure story, as the opposing forces work consistently to maintain the upper hand over each other across the margin of land and sea. The pilot remains at the centre of the action, usually responsible for taking decisive actions which usually lead to American success. Most notably, the narrative is punctuated by grand depictions of naval practice, from Jones's successful piloting of the *Ariel* through a storm over treacherously shallow waters, to the ship's subsequent wreckage later on in the novel, which claims the life of Tom Coffin (a notable

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<sup>16</sup> James Fenimore Cooper *The Pilot* p.1

<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed summary of the novel; the James Fenimore Cooper Society Website contains a chapter by chapter synopsis of each of his novels. (<http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/writings/plots/walker-pilot.html>)



sacrifice which will be given further examination). The novel ends with a scene of naval warfare between the surviving American forces and a war ship of the British navy.

In the climatic naval battle, Colonel Howard is mortally wounded, dying in a melodramatic scene in which he accepts the union of his daughter and niece to Griffith and Barnstable as well as the inevitability of American Independence. The novel, as one would expect, ends, typically for its genre, in multiple marriages. As James Grossman maintains, it is 'a convenient device to bring the story to an end', as if the 'heroine's marriage was the story's true reason for existence'.<sup>18</sup> However, whilst Cooper's middle heroes are safely married away, his title character is given less of a happy ending. The novel ends twelve years later after the events during the war, when Griffith learns of Jones's death through a newspaper. Visibly startled by the news, he gives his wife Cecilia a memorialisation of the sailor extraordinaire and thusly the subject of the pilot is never again mentioned between them.

Aspects of the romantic plot may be recognised as typical; but, this is not to say that *The Pilot* is a typical revolutionary romance. On the surface, the novel can be seen to throw an alliance of heroic American rebels against an autocratic troop of English villains. However, a more precise definition of the conflict will determine a battle between American rebels and loyalists. It should be stressed that Colonel Howard is not some stereotypical English tyrant, more he is a gentleman born and raised within colonial America. As I think it important to maintain, the novel's conflict is focused upon the Revolutionary American mindset, classified by both a bitter and typical sense of resentment towards English aristocracy as well as an internal wariness of the repercussions of social disarray represented by the revolution itself.

The coastal setting of England of course serves as a symbolic backdrop for the conflict. The landscape of Northumbria is scenic, inland the country is largely non-threatening, 'a cultivated country, divided in the usual manner, by hedges and walls', with the exception of a couple of

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<sup>18</sup> Grossman James *Fenimore Cooper: American Men of Letters Series* p.21

redcoats that appear towards the novel's climax.<sup>19</sup> The Colonel's home at St Ruth's Abbey with its 'windings and turnings, both internally and externally' conveys the imposing sense of a fortress but is easily infiltrated by our American heroes.<sup>20</sup> Located near St Ruth are a set of ruins in which our rebelling heroes take refuge. Coupled with the maze-like layout of the Colonel's temporary home the ruins are reflective of England's rich cultural history, an aspect that is lacking in the landscape of colonial America. 'Ruins in a land are', as Captain Heidegger eloquently proclaims in *The Red Rover*: 'like most of the signs of decay in the human form, sad evidences of abuses and passions, which have hastened the inroads of time'.<sup>21</sup> Alternatively, the sea represents danger and turmoil on a far more effective and immediate scale with its treacherously shallow waters and foul weather conditions, but Cooper as Philbrick says, seems to 'share Scott's reluctance to leave the shore', the sea scenes only serving to punctuate the action of this supposed 'tale of the sea'. Ultimately any questions regarding the suitability of Cooper's choice of setting are answered through its very isolation from the rest of the country, which keeps the overwhelming power of the British Empire at arm's length and the novel's conflict contained between Howard and Munson, the loyalists versus rebels.

In his 1949 study of Cooper, James Grossman criticised *The Pilot* for having a degenerative effect upon the values of the American Revolution. The basic premise of *The Pilot* is based around the notion of revenge, as Captain Munson proclaims early on in the novel: bringing 'the evils of war, from [American] shores, home to those who have caused it'.<sup>22</sup> What is more, the war that liberated America from the vice of British tyranny and suppression becomes an aggressive war fought primarily for the salvation of two women. As a result, Grossman condemns *The Pilot* for its perversion of the idealistic principles of the American Revolution: 'the humanitarian reader is

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<sup>19</sup> *The Pilot* p.10

<sup>20</sup> *ibid* p.57

<sup>21</sup> James Fenimore Cooper *The Red Rover* – 1827 (Printed in the UK by Lightning Source, The Dodo Press, 2007) p.47

<sup>22</sup> *The Pilot* p. 62

shocked to see the American Revolution turned into the Siege of Troy'.<sup>23</sup> However, in light of Cooper's personal feelings towards the Revolution, Grossman's criticism comes to illuminate a new way of reading *The Pilot*, since one could argue that this is how Cooper intended warfare in this instance to come across.

Cooper's personal feelings towards the implications of the American Revolution are difficult to determine. John P. McWilliams has identified three different classifications within Cooper's writings.<sup>24</sup> The first is a belief in the overwhelming sanctity of the revolutionary cause, which can usually be traced when the author writes as a historian. For example, in the beginning of *The Pilot*, Cooper describes the circumstances surrounding the North Sea, where the British have 'long asserted a jurisdiction, exceeding that which reason concedes to any power on the highway of nations, and which frequently led to conflicts that caused an expenditure of blood and treasure'.<sup>25</sup> With hindsight, Cooper is able to justify the historical importance of the Revolution. The second classification is more moderate, whilst voicing the justness of the Revolution there is still a respect for civil law and a proper decorum in which a gentleman should behave. This is represented by Cooper's middle heroes, men called upon in war to perform a duty to their country. Once their duty is fulfilled they can reintegrate themselves into civilised life ruled by laws and government. This can blend with the third classification, which is defined as Cooper's perception of the Revolutionary conflict as a bitter and bloody civil war where political principles become less important than gentlemanly fidelity.<sup>26</sup> This third definition seems to have been given more prevalence in recent

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<sup>23</sup> James Grossman *James Fenimore Cooper* p.38-39 As we shall see across his nautical trilogy, Cooper is not the kind of personality to relish in scenes of overt gore and violence. At an individual level dramatic conflict is resolved through lengthy discourse between characters or at least a duel. This occurs between Captain Manual and Bourroughcliffe in Chapter XXX, in which the former receives a head injury whilst the latter receives a leg injury. On a larger level, for example when an American ship is being pursued by an English vessel, battle is usually inevitable but ultimately Cooper only justifies war as a means of restoring domestic peace by the novel's end.

<sup>24</sup> John P. McWilliams Jnr *Political Justice in a Republic: James Fenimore Cooper's America* (London, University of California Press 1972)pp.37-44

<sup>25</sup> *The Pilot* p.1

<sup>26</sup> John P. McWilliams Jnr *Political Justice in a Republic* p.40

criticism, as Franklin maintains, Cooper is seen to be cautious about the social upheaval that the revolution represented:

Cooper had no doubt about the justness of the Revolution as a war of liberation from British imperial control, but he was nonetheless intrigued by those Americans who had opposed the war, fought on behalf of Britain, or simply remained neutral. His enduring view of the Revolution as a civil war, not just a struggle for national liberation from a colonial empire, was unusual at the time.<sup>27</sup>

The novelist's father, William Cooper (a Federalist congressman) 'was from a Quaker background' based in the Delaware valley, and during the war had followed the Quaker's pacifist approach to the Revolutionary war, which was at odds with the militant reaction of the Puritan sect of society.<sup>28</sup> Added to this, Cooper's wife coming from the once prosperous family, the DeLanceys, were Loyalists during the war and lost much of their fortune due to their allegiances to the monarchy.<sup>29</sup> As Franklin maintains, there is a lingering theme of 'dispossession' in the author's earlier revolutionary romances. Certainly Colonel Howard is an emblem of dispossession, fleeing American shores out of fear that his daughter and niece will marry rebels and the fact that he is said to have lost a great deal of his fortune due to his loyalty. Another form of dispossession can be found within the figure of the pilot, which occurs on a more moral level. As H. Daniel Peck states, Cooper was wary of 'the way in which noble motive and high purpose can be distorted by the violence and chaos that inevitably accompany social rebellion'.<sup>30</sup>

At the end of the Eighteenth Century, the ugly turn the French Revolution took following the execution of Louis XVI demonstrated the extremes of civil disorder more than the American

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<sup>27</sup> Wayne Franklin *The Early Years* p.5

<sup>28</sup> *ibid* p.2

<sup>29</sup> *ibid* p.5

<sup>30</sup> H. Daniel Peck, 'Repossession of America: The Revolution in Cooper's Trilogy of Nautical Romances' *Studies in Romanticism* Vol.15, No.4 (1976) p.589

Revolution ever did. Recalling Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the Guillotine, the 'sharp female newly-born' became a symbol at the centre of the revolutionary whirlpool representing the mechanical cutthroat wrath of a mob ruled society within the Reign of Terror.<sup>31</sup> The influence of the American revolutionary experience had on the people of France cannot be denied, supported and championed by the likes of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine up to a point. Effectively allies during the War of Independence, France had endorsed American rebellion against the English, but in so doing, the country became bankrupt leading to widespread starvation and desperation among the lower classes. The purging of France's aristocracy of course created divides within American government, with the Federalists led by John Adams believing the revolution had gone too far and the Republicans accepting the will of the people. Specifically, the French Revolution influenced the nature of governing the United States, the decision over a big central system or something that was more representative and accountable to the people.

Whilst we do not see this level of anxiety on display in Dicken's magnum opus, Cooper's first three novels portrays the American revolutionary era 'as a time of deception, of self-serving and self-sacrifice', with American retaliation unleashing its own brand of tyranny.<sup>32</sup> Although Cooper may have viewed the Revolution as a civil war; 'not just a struggle for national liberation from a colonial empire', his fictionalisation of Jones seems to be motivated by such shallow notions. As Berger suggests, the pilot is representative of the national narrative that runs throughout the novel, a narrative that I suggest is imbued with the two-sided nature of revolutionary tension.

Cooper's ships are never truly microcosmic to the extent we may see in Melville. For instance a reading of *White-Jacket or The World in a Man-of-War* provides a more detailed portrayal of the dimensions of an American warship. Instead, Cooper's ships contain an affiliation of sea heroes who adhere to the proper decorum and gentility of accepted naval tradition, which we may also say is

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Dickens *A Tale of Two Cities* 1859 (London, Penguin Classics 2003)p.264

<sup>32</sup> Wayne Franklin *Fathering the Son: The Cultural Origins of James Fenimore Cooper* - originally published within *Resources for American Literary Study*, Vol. 7, No.2 (2001) p.155

descended from the practice of the British navy. If the novel is as Peck says, a bourgeois construct, then the proletarian environment of the ship can prove to be a threatening aspect to the sea novel's readability within middle class circles. As Cooper comments in his preface, a ship in reality is composed of 'several hundred rude beings confined within the narrow limits of a vessel, men of all nations and of the lowest habits'.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the novel, the main body of the ship's crew are treated, as Berger says, as 'labour as opposed to labourers'.<sup>34</sup> Cooper does however make one concession with the character of Tom Coffin, the Nantucket whaler serving as Barnstable's bodyguard. Standing at 'nearly six feet and as many inches in his shoes', Coffin is quite literally a character born of the ocean, as he is quick to admit on numerous occasions throughout the novel:

I was born on board a chebacco-man, and never could see the use of more land than now and then a small island to raise a few vegetables, and to dry your fish - I'm sure the sight of it always makes me feel uncomfortable unless we have the wind dead off shore.<sup>35</sup>

Philbrick describes Coffin as one of Cooper's 'ideal seamen' representing the epitome of seamanship as well as standing as a man of grounded moral stature who serves as a colourful diversion from his lengthy cast of genteel naval officers.<sup>36</sup> Alternatively Grossman criticises Coffin as being an unoriginal creation, 'the product of mechanical extravagance presented more as a marine animal exotic in its simplicity than as a man'.<sup>37</sup> Grossman obviously finds fault with the character's errant simplicity, but it is necessary to appreciate Coffin since, as Berger states, he is surrounded by the collected assortment of genteel heroes - 'a potentially radical literary and social common hero'.<sup>38</sup> Akin to a maritime version of Natty Bumppo, Coffin is rich with the supranational poetics of the

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<sup>33</sup> Cooper, 'Preface' to *The Pilot* p.iii

<sup>34</sup> Berger p.649

<sup>35</sup> *The Pilot* p.10

<sup>36</sup> Philbrick, *Development of American Sea Fiction* p.82-83

<sup>37</sup> Grossman, *James Fenimore Cooper* p.38

<sup>38</sup> Jason Berger, 'Killing Tom Coffin' p.653

genre, predating Melville's 'chivalric aggrandizement' of the common sailor.<sup>39</sup> In one of the novel's battle scenes, the coxswain is thought to be lost until he miraculously ascends out of the water effectively ending by pinning the enemy ship's captain to the masthead: 'his iron visage rendered fierce by his previous discomfiture and his grizzled locks drenched with the briny element from which he had risen, looking like Neptune with his trident'.<sup>40</sup>

Strangely, Cooper sought to kill the character of Tom Coffin in Chapter XXIV in which the *Ariel* is wrecked in a storm. It is a strange literary decision since as Philbrick comments the character of Coffin is such a vital component to the novel that 'the structure of *The Pilot* collapses with his death'.<sup>41</sup> It is the focus of Berger's study into the complex relationship between labour and class that exists within *The Pilot* in which Coffin 'begins as a working-class caricature that adds colour to the naval adventure, yet emerges as the site where the internal contradictions of the nation converge'.<sup>42</sup> In the quest for American liberty and independence, in this particular battle against suppression and autocracy, Coffin is still largely defined by his social status despite his prescribed heroism. His imminent death, as Berger argues, certifies that the lowly coxswain has largely been defined by a life of bondage.

Despite being enlisted in the American navy in this instance, Coffin is a whaler by profession which marks him distinctly as an American hero (his father was a Coffin, his mother a Joy and 'the two names count more flukes than all the rest in the island [on Nantucket] together').<sup>43</sup> Although this demands respect from his peers, including Katherine who listens to his philosophising 'in honour of the whalers of Nantucket',<sup>44</sup> Coffin is still very much in the mode of his profession to the point

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid p.668 n.25

<sup>40</sup> *The Pilot* p.192

<sup>41</sup> Philbrick, James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction p.83

<sup>42</sup> Berger p.665

<sup>43</sup> *The Pilot* p.249 I need not go into the importance of the highly lucrative whaling industry at this point in American history. However, during both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, the Nantucket whaling industry was on both occasions almost reduced to ruin, which perhaps explains Coffin's appearance on board the *Ariel*.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid* p.249

Barnstable must remind him of their tactical purpose: "Pshaw! You are not on a whaling-voyage, where everything that offers is game".<sup>45</sup>

Berger reads one scene in particular as an example of how Coffin oversteps his social boundaries. In Chapter XXII, Coffin is apprehended by Colonel Howard's right hand man Captain Borroughcliffe. So impressed by Coffin, Borroughcliffe gives him the choice over either joining the King's navy or death. Coffin reacts defiantly in his sea loving manner, rejecting any form of military conduct: "A messmate, before a shipmate; a shipmate, before a stranger; a stranger, before a dog - but a dog before a soldier!"<sup>46</sup> Coffin goes on to overpower Borroughcliffe and gags him with the hilt of his own sword, after which the coxswain 'now appeared to think himself entitled to all the privileges of a conqueror'.<sup>47</sup> As Berger enthuses, 'Cooper depicts not only an American sailor defeating a British sailor but [more] importantly, an indecorous whaleman-coxswain defeating a refined captain in a duel-like struggle'.<sup>48</sup> The harpoon, the tool of Coffin's profession, symbolically overriding the sword, a weapon of Borroughcliffe's profession. Despite this, Coffin leaves the captain amicably:

"Harkye, friend," said the cockswain, "may the Lord forgive you, as I do, for wishing to make a solider of a seafaring man, and one who has followed the waters since he was an hour old, and one who hopes to die off soundings, and to be buried in brine"<sup>49</sup>

Unfortunately for Coffin, as Berger states, Cooper has made some sort of faux pas, as if Coffin has overstepped the limits of his social standings by overpowering this higher ranking English villain! As a result Coffin is now marked for the sea-worthy death he hopes for.<sup>50</sup> As a supranational construct,

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid* p.11

<sup>46</sup> *ibid* p.242

<sup>47</sup> *ibid* p.243

<sup>48</sup> Berger, 'Killing Tom Coffin' p.650

<sup>49</sup> *The Pilot* p.244

<sup>50</sup> In hindsight, Cooper regrets killing Tom Coffin as his daughter's biographical note reveals: 'With Long Tom Coffin, also, he was in later life less satisfied than most of his readers. As he looked back at the character, in



Coffin has complicated the narrative, 'a romantic lower-class constituent who [has] risen too far for comfort.'<sup>51</sup> In one last moment of heroism and rebellion against social hierarchy, Coffin defiantly rejects an order to abandon ship from his superior officer, and goes down with the *Ariel*.

The character of the pilot also communicates with the supranational elements of the sailor through his aversion towards landed society and his almost supernatural understanding of the ship and the sea but he also exists to serve the national narrative, to ensure success of the American war effort. Coffin has no real alignment with the pilot's vocal revolutionary sentiment, similarly 'the pilot's skill and motivations - unlike Coffin's whaling and merchant associations - clearly exist on the symbolic plane of national naval activity and are paramount to the United States' revolutionary causes'.<sup>52</sup> Berger is adamant that Tom Coffin is sacrificed so Cooper can focus the heroic narrative more upon the figure of the Pilot. Whilst I would agree with Berger on the sacrifice of Coffin on the grounds of complicating the narrative, I would disagree over the portrayal of the pilot as the novel's hero. Coffin's death at least carries some form of heroism and dignity since he effectively chooses the moment of his death by going down with the ship, however, the same cannot be said for Mr Gray. Clearly the pilot does not emerge as the novel's hero nor do I feel that this was ever Cooper's intention. In league with Donald Darnell's analysis, Gray is 'a hero whose accomplishments on the sea make him an honoured naval officer, but whose birth and manners unfit him for a place in Cooper's pantheon of genteel heroes'.<sup>53</sup>

When looking at Cooper's fictionalisation of Jones, it is necessary to emphasise his supranationality as well as his bastardised sense of nationality. He is both part of the American ship, as pilot, yet at

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the maturity of long experience, he saw it with a clearer view, a greater fullness of conception, a more complete finish of detail; he considered it, as it now appears, as only a sketch, and would gladly have wrought up the portrait of the old salt, a man after his own heart, to a finished picture, as he had done with Natty Bumppo. He felt that he had not done full justice to Long Tom'. Susan Fenimore Cooper *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper* p.77

<sup>51</sup> Berger 'Killing Tom Coffin' p. 647

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*p.658

<sup>53</sup> Darnell 'Cooper's Problematic Pilot: "Unrighteous ambition" in a Patriotic Cause' *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art* ed. George A. Test (1991) pp.135-142 (p136)

the same time he is also completely separate since he is British. In his own words he is 'only a humble follower of the friends of America'.<sup>54</sup> He is a Scottish man by birthright although he possesses, as Griffith identifies 'a small bur-r-r' in his voice that would identify him as an American born and bred.<sup>55</sup> He is of course vocally infused with the ideological ideals of the American Revolution ('it is but of little moment where a man is born, or how he speaks',<sup>56</sup>) and staunchly opposed to the British monarchy as he defiantly proclaims:

I was born on this orb, and I claim to be a citizen of it. A man with a soul not to be limited by the arbitrary boundaries of tyrants and hirelings<sup>57</sup>

Whenever he can, Jones seems quick to remind even his American allies of their duty to the patriotic cause. The pilot, just by definition of purpose, is the one who steers the ship along a pre-determined course to reach a destination. Simply, he is supposed to be a man of direction but he is quintessentially a nomad, and ultimately the formation of a new civilisation is his quest, 'the end and salvation of the nomadic life'.<sup>58</sup>

Initially, Cooper's Jones is known only as 'The Pilot', a mysterious individual dressed in a 'pea-jacket' collected by will of Congress to aid the Americans in their campaign across the Northumbrian Coast, a most hazardous coastline of which the pilot possesses invaluable navigational information and experience. Cool and collected, the pilot is forever standing in his 'unmoved and quiet manner, a spectator of, but hardly an actor in the scene'.<sup>59</sup> However, even from the start there is a lingering sense of fire in the pilot's demeanour, during the strategic conference onboard the

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<sup>54</sup> *The Pilot* p.324

<sup>55</sup> *ibid* p.21

<sup>56</sup> *ibid* p.22

<sup>57</sup> *ibid* p.139

<sup>58</sup> Mary Bain Campbell 'Travel Writing and its Theory' in *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader* ed. by Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor (Edinburgh University Press 2007) p.323

<sup>59</sup> *The Pilot* p.71

frigate in chapter VII, there is bickering between the navy and the marines, which the pilot throws a 'fierce glance' towards.

As Franklin says, it was unusual for Cooper to pick Jones as his novel's dominant hero, with 'negative British propaganda portraying Jones as a traitor and a pirate' which strangely enough coloured his reputation in America as well.<sup>60</sup> It seems that Jones is inescapably remembered as a difficult character defined more by war than anything else. In *Israel Potter*, Melville has his title character share a cabin with the Captain who is described as a 'troubled spirit'. Not sleeping 'a wink that night', Potter watches Jones secretly, as he paces the cabin 'as if advancing upon a fortification'. Observing himself in a mirror, Jones is described as having 'a dash of pleased coxcombr'y' mingled with feeling of 'savage satisfaction' expressed upon his face'.<sup>61</sup>

When the pilot is on board the American frigate, he becomes known by the vague name of 'Mr Gray'.<sup>62</sup> Yet, Cooper never openly states that the pilot is in fact John Paul Jones, the first hero of the United States navy, it is a fact that is merely implied. Captain Munson, the commander of the American forces, is the only shipboard character who appears to have a history with the pilot and is aware of his true identity. Griffith, much like the rest of the crew is initially suspicious of the pilot and his background. However, this feeling is soon dispelled when Gray himself gives Griffith proof of his real identity by means of 'a parchment, decorated with ribands, and bearing a massive seal' and signed by the late king of France.

Griffith gazed with wonder at the fair signature of the unfortunate Louis, which graced the bottom of the parchment; but when his eye obeyed the signal of the stranger, and rested on the body of the instrument, he started back from the table, and fixing his

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<sup>60</sup> Franklin *The Early Years* p.401 Franklin points towards Cooper's pilot being inspired by Nathaniel Fanning's *Narrative of the Adventures of an American Navy Officer* (1806) which included a scathing criticism of Jones's 'personal character and martial conduct' (p.402)

<sup>61</sup> Herman Melville *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co 1855) pp.103-106

<sup>62</sup> *The Pilot* p.30 "I leave all to the pilot," said the captain... "What say you, Mr Gray?"

animated eyes on the pilot, he cried, while a glow of fiery courage flitted across his countenance:

"Lead on! I'll follow you to death!"<sup>63</sup>

The connection with the French aristocracy is notable. As Louis XVI was favoured by American leaders during the Revolution, an ally in the face of the English, his subsequent execution in 1793 was widely regarded as unfortunately giving way to the tyranny of the majority through the French lower classes. For Gray, it means that he is not necessarily enlisted in the fight for liberty, more as an act of revenge against the English or to exert his own power.<sup>64</sup> Again, we can go back to Melville's portrayal of Jones in which he becomes 'a prophetic ghost, glimmering in anticipation upon the advent of those tragic scenes of the French Revolution which levelled the exquisite refinement of Paris with the bloodthirsty ferocity of Borneo'.<sup>65</sup> The fact that Jones is so characteristically defined by a brooding sense of war and escalation brings us ultimately to question why Cooper ever used this character in the first place, unless it is indeed to communicate with concerns over the revolutionary dilemma.

The pilot is a man of action and a vital component of the novel's narrative, pushing the tone of adventure forward. This occurs systematically throughout the novel, beginning most notably with his piloting of the Ariel through the storm in chapter V in which Griffith and the crew have no choice but to obey 'as if life and death depended on his dispatch'.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, when American forces take refuge in the ruins near St Ruth's Abbey they are apprehended by Howard's forces, the pilot manages to slip away and return to his allies with decisive force. In chapter XXVIII, Griffith and Barnstable as well as Cecilia and Katherine are outnumbered by Howard's forces, the scene escalates into an atmosphere that promises violence, with Jones's better half as always pleading for peaceful

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<sup>63</sup> *ibid* p.77

<sup>64</sup> According to Stephen Howarth and his history of the US Navy *To Shining Sea* Jones himself had dreams of settling in America but ended up in the service of other notable autocrats including Katherine the Great.

<sup>65</sup> *Israel Potter* p.105

<sup>66</sup> *The Pilot* p.36

resolution between the warring factions. Before she can resolve the scene, she realises with a degree of horror that Jones has reappeared with reinforcements:

While she yet stood in the attitude of unconscious helplessness, the doorway became again darkened, and the figure of the Pilot was seen on its threshold, clad, as usual, in the humble vestments of his profession, but heavily armed with the weapons of naval war.<sup>67</sup>

With this, the pilot orders Howard to yield himself 'to the power of the Thirteen Republics' and negotiates for the women to join their respected fiancés.<sup>68</sup> Howard naturally questions the motives of these rebels ("even these rash boys know not where obedience is due"), over whom the pilot for the first time admits authority. Barnstable, the 'reckless sailor' still very much suspicious of the pilot's intentions is first to retort.<sup>69</sup>

"And who is this." He cried. "Who dare give such an order to me!"

The eyes of the Pilot flashed with a terrible fire, while a fierce glow seemed to be creeping over his whole frame, which actually quivered with passion. But, suppressing this exhibition of his feelings, by a sudden and powerful effort, he answered in an emphatic manner:

"One who has a right to order, and who *will* be obeyed!"<sup>70</sup>

If Cooper made Tom Coffin overstep himself in the scene in which he defeated Borroughcliffe, then this is definitely the point in which the pilot betrays his mandate and fulfils his own autocratic tendencies over both his allies and enemies.

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<sup>67</sup> ibid p.322

<sup>68</sup> ibid p.323

<sup>69</sup> ibid p.65

<sup>70</sup> ibid p.332

The pilot is plagued by a rage against the autocratic tendencies of Great Britain, a tendency that begins to manifest itself in his own character and which ultimately hinders his own chances to lead a life in a land free from British rule. The only real threat posed by the British seems to be that they have brought shame upon his name by labelling him a pirate. To the gentlemanly hero of the romantic tradition this is an affront to his honourable identity (as is the case with Captain Heidegger in Cooper's second sea novel *The Red Rover* as we shall see in the next chapter), but because Gray is no real gentleman of accepted convention these threats remain empty. At no point does he clear his name, because he is essentially a warrior looking to find glorification and promotion in whichever navy will have him. Fame is a psychological necessity for Gray, as Kay Seymour House maintains, to the point in which he becomes 'a slave to his own obsession'.<sup>71</sup> After the loyalist forces have been apprehended, Colonel Howard's right hand man, Borroughcliffe (perhaps the novel's quintessential English gentleman) confronts the pilot over the barbarism to which he has been submitted.<sup>72</sup> The pilot responds characteristically with silence, a cool nonchalant response to a man of higher social status. With this response Borroughcliffe responds by attacking Jones's social status.

He is no more than a common pilot, after all! No true gentleman would have received so palpable a hint with such a start!<sup>73</sup>

Gray is essentially a character born in Britain, but not fortunate enough to be born into British gentry. Had he been so fortunate, he would undoubtedly be qualified enough to preside in the upper echelons of the British navy. In the reality of his situation his prowess and effectiveness, his almost supernatural communion with the ship, make him more suitable towards American promotion (where Cohen states 'know-how' and 'skilled work' become the 'common denominator of

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<sup>71</sup> Kay Seymour House *Cooper's Americans* (Ohio State University Press 1965) p.191

<sup>72</sup> *ibid* p.355 "I take the liberty of whispering in your ear that I have been scurvily treated by you - I repeat, most scurvily treaded by you all, generally, and by you in particular."

<sup>73</sup> *The Pilot* p.356

class').<sup>74</sup> However, when it comes to idealistic principle, in which he appears staunchly infused with an American sense of liberty, he is without destination, at least within Cooper's narrative. This is demonstrated most plainly through his relationship with Alice Dunscombe, who he effectively leaves a widow for a life of war and adventure. Whilst Dunscombe represents domestic tranquillity and pacifism ("I cannot wish death to any one, not even to my enemies"<sup>75</sup>), Jones is the complete opposite, masculine wrath and suppressed rage. In their last dialogue, Dunscombe criticises the pilot over his aggressive nature:

"You have gained a name, John, among the warriors of the age," she answered, in a subdued voice; "and it is a name that may be said to be written in blood!"<sup>76</sup>

Jones justifies simply by enthusing that it is "the blood of the enemies of freedom"<sup>77</sup> but of course Dunscombe fails to see the difference. Ultimately, the pilot's vendetta fuels American victory, but when the war inevitably comes to an end and the much cherished new order is established, his character is misplaced. Simply, Gray cannot occupy the domestic ending of the middle hero as is demonstrated in *The Pilot's* poignant final chapter.

Cooper chooses to end *The Pilot* twelve years after the events along the Northumbrian Coast providing a rundown of the various fates of each of the other characters. Barnstable, for example gains further promotion within the United States Navy and is unsurprisingly revealed to be enjoying a happy marriage with Katherine. The cabin boy Merry grows up to be enlisted within the navy as well but is said to die 'in a duel with a foreign officer'.<sup>78</sup> Cooper seems to allude to the ongoing adventures of Captain Manual, literally a mini-epic in itself, which sees the captain of the marines reunited with his friendly nemesis Captain Borroughcliffe during the western campaign that marked

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<sup>74</sup> Margaret Cohen 'Travelling Genres' in *New Literary History* Vol. 34 No.3 (2003) p.483

<sup>75</sup> *ibid* p.312

<sup>76</sup> *ibid* p.347

<sup>77</sup> *ibid* p.348

<sup>78</sup> *The Pilot* p.405

the end of the Revolutionary War. Both characters die under unfortunate circumstances, Manual is shot by his own soldier after rather foolishly forgetting the password to his own garrison, whilst Borroughcliffe dies of a fever a year after. They die, however, after forming a strong friendship. Between their respected garrisons, they establish 'a sort of neutral territory' upon which they build a log cabin, within which they entertain one another with friendly communion, fine dining as well as reminiscing over their escapades during the Northumbrian campaign.<sup>79</sup> Through their relationship, Cooper brings an idealistic and amicable close to the Revolutionary War, no further barbarism or oppressive conflict, just two men who despite their differences are bound by friendship.

After such grand escapades, Cooper locates us in the homestead of Griffith. Cooper's most anchored middle hero has retired from his career as sailor and 'devoted the remainder of his life to the conjoint duties of a husband and a good citizen'.<sup>80</sup> The novel's final scene sees Griffith learn of the pilot's untimely demise through the newspaper. Visibly shaken, Cecilia presses her husband with an explanation, to which follows a rather ambiguous memorialisation of Gray's character.

"His devotion to America proceeded from desire of distinction, his ruling passion, and perhaps a little also from resentment at some injustice which he claimed to have suffered from his own countrymen."<sup>81</sup>

His 'desire of distinction, his ruling passion' is what is most important. In a sense the pilot is remembered as a peculiar autocrat of sorts. He seeks the American way, mainly out of scorn of his homeland, but in so doing he exercises his own tyrannical tendencies against the country who denied him such power from birth. He represents the danger that Cooper was wary of, the vengeful social backlash that comes from overthrowing the suppressing power. As a result, as Darnell quite

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<sup>79</sup> The Pilot p.406

<sup>80</sup> *ibid* p.408

<sup>81</sup> *ibid* p.410



rightly says, Griffith, Cooper's conventional genteel married middle hero, the *safe* bankable choice, emerges as the real hero of the novel.<sup>82</sup>

The resolution that comes at the end of the novel is bittersweet, concluding within a dry environment, a world away from the purgatorial demise of the pilot.. When first published, Cooper was initially expecting a resounding failure since, as he attests in his original preface, by writing a novel about the sea he risked alienating the tastes of women, his biggest demographic group of readers.<sup>83</sup> As Franklin notes, Cooper was going to discard *The Pilot* until a close friend, James Aitchison, read and approved it.<sup>84</sup> Eventually *The Pilot* went on to be 'decidedly successful' as Cooper writes in a letter to his friend William Branford Shubrick (to whom the novel is dedicated).<sup>85</sup> Later on in his career, *The Pilot* was republished in a collection of Cooper's best works including *Last of the Mohicans*, and *The Red Rover*. The success of the novel is down to the adventurous tone, the excitement of Cooper's sea scenes but also more to the fact that Cooper writes an effective romantic narrative familiar in the conventional English tradition.<sup>86</sup> Whilst the John Paul Jones character of the pilot is probably too problematic and conflicted, the more agreeable character of Griffith (and to a lesser extent Barnstable) serve to end the novel and justify the action and warfare that has occurred throughout.

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<sup>82</sup> Donald Darnell *Cooper's Problematic Pilot: "Unrighteous Ambition" in a Patriotic Cause* originally published *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art* (1989) p.135-142

<sup>83</sup> "The women very generally protested that such a book would have the odour of bilge water, and that it would give them the *maladie de mer*." Preface to 1824 edition of *The Pilot* p. ii

<sup>84</sup> Franklin *Cooper: The Early Years* p.409

<sup>85</sup> 'The sale is the best criterion in such matters, and that is very great - It is very little if any short of *Spy* in popularity, though opinions are as various as men's minds - I found Wiley (\*Charles Wiley Cooper's publisher) had the book in the hands of five printers on my return for a reprint - If it has not been as much commended it has certainly been less assailed than any book I have ever written - so much for our *joint* efforts.' A letter written 25-30? January -5 February 1824 as contained in the first volume of James Franklin Beard's *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University 1960) p.110

<sup>86</sup> 'An unsigned review of *The Pilot* in the *New-York Mirror* (December 1824) makes much of the sea -scenes - 'every sea-scene in the novel, is excellent; but the piloting of the frigate through the breakers and the shoals at midnight - the wrecking of the *Ariel*, the fierce sea-fights, and above all, perhaps the last hours of the gun captain and cockswain, Long Tom, and the death of the sailing master, Boltrope - are given with a truth and force, and generate such a breathless interest...' James *Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage* ed. by George Dekker and John P. McWilliams (London and Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1978)p.74 - 75

In conclusion, *The Pilot* is an intensely nationalistic novel that has less in common with portrayals of the supranational thematics of the American sailor and more to do with the discussion of the formation of a nation. The character of Tom Coffin and his fate may serve as evidence that Cooper, as Berger maintains, is protecting the national narrative, but ultimately through Cooper's characterisation of the pilot, there is an awareness of the complications in the division between England and America. Although of British lineage, the pilot is very much a pathfinder, an American styled hero existing in the periphery but always conscious and reactive to action that will ensure American victory. However, this fictionalisation of John Paul Jones is not the hero of this historical romance in the sense that Griffith or even Barnstable is. Behind his refined demeanour and his exceptional skill as a seaman, the pilot represents too much brutality and wrathful intention for Cooper's own civilised manner to permit the kind of ending bestowed upon his more genteel characters. Furthermore, I would suggest, as with Coffin, that the pilot too is sacrificed for the benefit of Cooper's ending, in which his more worthy heroes are able to establish themselves into a post-war world. Cooper can only condone war should it be a means to restore a state of domestic tranquillity as exemplified by the novel's ending scene. As a result, the novel can be described as sympathising with the English, illustrating the Revolutionary War as an unhappy falling out. Having hinted at a sense of turbulent maritime landlessness, Cooper as a literary force overpowers the alienation of the element in favour for a more conventional conclusion, the gentleman hero's enrolment into civilised life, an attainment of the 'middle-way'.

## Chapter 2.

### *The Red Rover: The Quest for an Individual and a National Identity.*

Those tyrants, teasing, tempting to rebel

Deserve the fate their fretting lips fortell.

Lord Byron *The Corsair* 1807<sup>1</sup>

“This is a wild and fickle element we dwell on.”

James Fenimore Cooper *The Red Rover* 1827<sup>2</sup>

As Jason Berger states, traditional scholarship on Cooper views his second sea novel, *The Red Rover* as his maritime masterpiece.<sup>3</sup> In Philbrick’s analysis, *The Red Rover* distinguishes itself over both *The Pilot* and *The Water Witch*, as Cooper’s ‘purest’ sea novel.<sup>4</sup> Whilst *The Pilot* ‘shares Scott’s reluctance to leave the shore’, ultimately faltering after the death of Tom Coffin, *The Water Witch* is overly focused on portraying ‘the supernatural and dream-like mood of *The Tempest*’. In contrast, *The Red Rover* is a most effective juxtaposition of the popular romance (defined thematically by ‘sublimity, supernaturalism, Satanism, and exoticism’ - the hallmarks of Byron and Scott) and Cooper’s own brand of maritime nationalism.<sup>5</sup>

In the previous chapter, I came to the conclusion that *The Pilot* sacrificed the supranational element in preservation of a nationalist narrative, making it more typical of the historical romance.

With *The Red Rover*, Cooper writes a more coherent national narrative, where the Rover’s quest for

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<sup>1</sup> Byron ‘The Corsair’ in *The Selected Works of Lord Byron* (Paris and Lyon, B. Cormon and Blanc 1835)

<sup>2</sup> Cooper *The Red Rover* (1827 edition reprinted by Lightning Source UK, Dodo Press. 2007)

<sup>3</sup> Jason Berger ‘Killing Tom Coffin: Rethinking the Nationalist Narrative in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pilot*’ in *Early American Literature* Vol.43 No.3 (2008) p.663

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Philbrick *James Fenimore Cooper and The Development of American Sea Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press 1961) p.54 ‘The *Red Rover* is the “purest” sea novel of the three and as such is most nearly in the center of the stream of Cooper’s nautical fiction’. Arguably, Philbrick’s analysis of Cooper’s early nautical romances are hindered by his square focus upon *The Red Rover* as the significant novel of the trilogy. More recently, John Peck, in his comparative study also focuses mostly upon *The Red Rover* as the defining book of Cooper’s early romances.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p.53-54: Phrased as maritime nationalism, Philbrick illustrates how Cooper wrote in such a way as to unify the American people through an emphasis upon the glories of the nation’s maritime endeavours. Ultimately, by doing so, Cooper not only voices a sense of patriotic pride but a view of what America should and can be after it heals the tension and conflict between rebelling underclasses and their autocratic masters.

identity is carried out in parallel with the development of American Independence. Written in France, the main difference with Cooper's second sea novel is that it is located (at least for the first half) upon mainland America, the novel's source materials are distinctly American.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the pre-revolutionary setting brings a sense of obscurity to the narrative. As Hugh Egan states, by setting the novel in 1759 - 'Cooper progressively blurs his oppositions, and in the end deliberately obscures the line between the sea and land, male and female, America and England'.<sup>7</sup>

The basic premise of *The Red Rover* is the quest of one Harry Wilder. Another of Cooper's obligatory middle heroes Wilder is a secret agent of the throne, tasked with hunting down the villainous pirate known only as the Red Rover, and bringing him into justice in accordance with British law. Of course all is not what it seems, the Rover is far more chivalrous than his pirate label would suggest. As Peck maintains 'he is an American who has rejected his place in the existing order, and in rejecting the past has become an outlaw'.<sup>8</sup> Effectively a pre-revolutionary revolutionaire, the Rover ultimately wins Wilder over to his side through his genteel charm and devotion to his homeland and the inevitability of a nation state free from British tyranny. Ultimately Heidegger is representative of the fact that all nationalisms 'in their early stages develop from a condition of estrangement'.<sup>9</sup>

Beginning in Newport Harbour in the winter of 1759, Cooper locates the reader to a specific time and place. Newport is an emblem of the success of America as a maritime nation, 'enjoying the four great requisites of a safe and commodious haven, a placid basin, an outer harbour, and a

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<sup>6</sup> In Susan Fenimore Cooper's preface to *The Red Rover* ('the most maritime novel in English literature') it is noted how much of the novel was written from the confines of 'a pleasant country house on the banks of the Seine' in a village just outside of Paris. Moreover, most of the novel's subject matter can be traced back to American sources; John James Aubudon's anecdote of the 'Zenaida Dove' provides a source of influence over the novel's redemptive plot whilst Cooper's visit to Newport harbour aboard his whale ship *Union* in the early 1820s provided the inspiration for the novel's initial setting. *Pages and Pictures* p.179-180

<sup>7</sup> The complication of gender binaries are more obvious in *The Water Witch* as we shall see in the next chapter. Hugh Egan 'Cooper and his Contemporaries' in *America and the Sea: A Literary History* ed. Haskell Springer (Athens and London, The University of Georgia Press, 1995)p.70

<sup>8</sup> John Peck *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in English and American Literature 1719-1917* (Basingstoke, Hampshire - Palgrave MacMillan, 2001) p.91

<sup>9</sup> Edward Said 'Reflections on Exile' as included within *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader* edited by Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor (Edinburgh University Press 2007)p.285

convenient roadstead, with a clear offing'.<sup>10</sup> Cooper then defines the social situation, where a pre-revolutionary American society, predominantly of British ancestry and custom, exists in a state of complacency:

The system of oppression and misrule, which hastened a separation that sooner or later must have occurred, had not yet commenced. The mother country, if not just, was still complaisant. Like all old and great nations, she was indulging in the pleasing, but dangerous enjoyment of self-contemplation. The qualities and services of a race, who were believed to be inferior, were, however, soon forgotten; or, if remembered, it was in order to be misrepresented and vituperated. As this feeling increased with the discontent of the civil dissensions, it led to still more striking injustice, and greater folly. Men who, from their observations, should have known better, were not ashamed to proclaim, even in the highest council of the nation, their ignorance of the character of a people with whom they had mingled their blood.

Though Cooper is, as ever, cold towards English sovereignty, at this point in time, the large majority of Americans are as yet unaware of the problems of the ruling power, to be a good American, as Egan states 'meant being a good Englishman'.<sup>11</sup> This is communicated through 'the gossiping tailor' character of Homespun, the first character Cooper introduces us to. Homespun is a haunted survivor of 'five long and bloody wars', a series of conflicts which have only strengthened Britain's hold over the colonies. Essentially he serves as a loyal subject of the throne.<sup>12</sup> When conversation turns towards The Red Rover, the latest threat to English law, Homespun can only wish swift and brutal justice to be brought upon this vicious outlaw of the throne. Through his strict and blind

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<sup>10</sup>Cooper *Red Rover* p.1

<sup>11</sup> Hugh Egan 'Cooper and his Contemporaries' p.70

<sup>12</sup> *Red Rover* p.9

affiliation to the throne, Cooper makes Homespun serve as a foolish archetype albeit a sympathetic one at that.

Cooper then goes on to introduce Wilder. Arriving in Newport, Wilder is flanked by his lifelong guardians Dick Fid and Scipio Africanus, an interracial pairing of bickering bosom buddies. As the trio discuss suitable maritime conduct, they meet with 'an unworthy barrister', a man 'between thirty and forty' of a prominent athletic physique. This is first of the many masquerades of the Red Rover, and whilst Wilder is suspicious, the gossiping tailor foolishly voices his suspicions over the slaver anchored in the outer harbour as being none other than the infamous pirate ship. The Rover in his lawful attire plays along with Homespun's concerns and kidnaps him later to stop him from gossiping further. Within these initial chapters set within Newport, Wilder and the Rover are drawn to one another, both highly suspicious of each other's true identity and engaging in guarded conversation. In one such scene of intellectual sparring, their dialogue is interrupted by the introduction of the Governess Mrs Wyllys, her nubile niece Gertrude Grayson and their Negro servant Cassandra. Mrs Wyllys is revealed to be the widow of the late Admiral de Lacey and it is learned that the three are preparing to undertake a voyage to Carolina on board the *Royal Caroline*. The Rover obviously sees an opportunity.

In Chapter V, Wilder's party of adventurers row out to the slaver with the intention of securing berths for themselves aboard the vessel. Wilder's suspicions are realised when he meets the captain who appears to be none other than the lawyer he encountered earlier in the day. Wilder wishes to return to shore, his main reason being to warn Mrs Wyllys and Gertrude from voyaging out tomorrow, since the Rover will undoubtedly seek to apprehend them. Without revealing his own identity and purpose, Wilder attempts to convince Mrs Wyllys that the *Royal Caroline* is unseaworthy but his attempts are thwarted by another of the Rover's many disguises, the old sailor masquerade of Bob Bunt. Unsuccessful, Wilder is informed the following morning that he has been promoted to captain of the *Royal Caroline* after the previous captain has been reported as sustaining a critical injury.

Onboard the *Royal Caroline*, Wilder is subjected to a series of unfortunate events, which eventually lead to mutiny and the ship's subsequent destruction by a hurricane. Salvation comes predictably, Wilder's party are soon collected by the *Dolphin* the Rover's ship. Despite Wilder's best efforts, the Rover's plan has succeeded. He has in his possession the widow of a reputable commanding officer of the British navy.

The narrative progresses several weeks later in which the Rover's ship sails within the waters of the Caribbean Sea. It is within this idyllic locale that we learn of many illuminating revelations of the novel's cast. For example, in Chapter XXIV, Fid goes to great lengths to inform the Rover of the formation of the trio, his 'sort of family', how they found Wilder as a baby, aboard an abandoned sinking English ship, the *Ark of Lynnhaven*.<sup>13</sup> Central to the novel, is the revelation of the Rover's true identity as Captain Heidegger and his fall into piracy. Once enlisted in the British navy, Heidegger killed a higher ranking officer after he spoke profanely against the Rover's native country.

"Would you think it, sir? One of his Commanders dared to couple the name of my country with an epithet I will not wound your ear by repeating!"

"I hope you taught the scoundrel manners."

The Rover faced his companion, and there was a ghastly smile on his speaking features, as he answered - "He never repeated the offence! 'Twas his blood or mine; and dearly did he pay the forfeit of his brutality."<sup>14</sup>

It is for this reason, that Heidegger remains an exile from the country as it now stands. A tragic figure who stands defiant, though solitary against any authority represented by the Union Jack.

In the latter stages of the novel, Cooper is able to create an atmosphere of suspense as the Rover is being pursued by the English warship the *Dart*. Heidegger, by flying the British flag from his

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<sup>13</sup> *Red Rover* p.326 "But then, as I had a sort of family of my own, since that day, why the less need, you know, to be birthing myself again in any other man's hammock".

<sup>14</sup> *ibid* p.297

own ship as well as creating another disguise manages to fool the warship into letting him aboard, an event which leads him to the revelation that Wilder is in fact a secret agent of the throne. What follows is the climatic sea battle between the ships, which is fuelled by the fiery wrath of Heidegger, resulting in his subsequent victory and the probable execution of Wilder and his party. As the party are faced by an onslaught of vengeful pirates, Scipio is killed in heroic defence of Wilder, which causes a lull in the violence, as Fid lashes himself to the body of his fallen comrade. The death of Scipio, however brings about the revelation of Wilder's true identity of Henry de Lacey, son of the late Admiral de Lacey. A dog tag is found upon his body, which once belonged to the canine owned by Mrs Wyllys who was present the day Wilder was found aboard the *Ark of Lynnhaven*. With this new revelation the Rover cannot in good conscience have Wilder killed in front of his long lost mother. The advent of further blood being shed is halted, and the party separate. He orders Wilder and his party to leave the ship, in so doing Wilder is witness to the destruction of the Dolphin as Heidegger sets the ship ablaze, thereby dismantling his life as a pirate. The Red Rover is never heard from again.

The novel ends, similarly to *The Pilot*, with a flash forward set twenty years after the events of the novel set within the Newport homestead of Henry de Lacey now married to Gertrude. Most of the main characters are present for this final scene, Mrs Wyllys, Dick Fid and even Homespun. Upon this domestic setting comes Heidegger, mortally wounded in battle and draped in the Stars and Stripes. In this more honourable guise the Rover is finally recognised as the true brother of Mrs Wyllys, and therefore uncle to Wilder. Heidegger then dies in a suitably melodramatic fashion having fought for the rightful cause of American Independence and so is finally redeemed of the sins of his past life as pirate.<sup>15</sup>

Undoubtedly, the relationship between Heidegger and Wilder is the pivotal focus of the novel. With *The Pilot*, readers were left disappointed over the death of Tom Coffin, and the antihero of John Paul

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<sup>15</sup> It is a death scene which Grossman has praised as being comparable to Bumpo's in melodrama and of course it is a fitting final scene for the character and the novel.



Jones perhaps failed to unite the collected sympathies of Cooper's audience. With *The Red Rover*, however, Cooper has crafted a more structurally coherent novel that relies upon the relationship between the gentleman pirate and his nephew of noble heritage. What I should now like to move on to is a deeper analysis of the Rover and Wilder because it seems that between these two characters we obviously have a clear cut opposition between English and American allegiances.

It could be argued that both characters do not strictly belong to any nation since they are initially maritime drifters. Wilder is an orphan (up until he is verified of noble birth) travelling from port to port with his sailing companions Scipio and Dick Fid. Comparatively Heidegger exists in an unusual place as a character of revolutionary sentiment, a citizen of the United States before the nation has officially been founded. Heidegger of course anticipates the formation of a new republic in a prophetic manner:

You have seen my flags, Mr Wilder: - but there was one wanting among them all; ay, and one which, had it existed, it would have been my pride, my glory, to have upheld with my heart's best blood!"<sup>16</sup>

By the novel's conclusion, both characters are defined by a quest for identity, Wilder perhaps obliviously though conventionally, but Heidegger is almost certainly attaining redemption of his own name through his noble death in the War of Independence. This is demonstrated in the novel's final scene, when Heidegger dies realising American victory.

"Wilder!" he repeated, laughing hysterically, "we have triumphed!"- Then he fell backward, without motion, the exulting lineaments settling in the gloom of death, as shadows obscure the smiling brightness of the sun'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Red Rover* p.296

<sup>17</sup> *ibid* p.445

Obviously the emphasis is on the unified 'we' - Wilder, Heidegger and the American people at large attaining individual identities in a new world order, no longer mere subjects to a throne. Cooper has inadvertently fulfilled the national narrative of the novel and the characters step away from their roles as outcasts and take their place in conventional society. Once again it is evidence of Cooper diluting the supranational tendencies invested within the characters to a domestic role that at least holds some kind of elevated social status in the wake of American Independence.

In contrast to Heidegger's honourable destination, in the earlier stages of the novel, the Red Rover is known at large as 'a desperate villain' in charge of a 'lawless ship' piloted by a crew of 'bloody-minded and nefarious thieves'.<sup>18</sup> Again, early in the narrative, the Rover's ship, the *Dolphin* is a foreboding presence. In the near collision in Chapter XII, Wilder anchors the Caroline 'within a cable's length of the supposed slaver' where 'the muzzles of the threatening guns gaped constantly on his vessel, as the eye of the crouching tiger follows the movement of its prey'.<sup>19</sup> In the scenes prior to Wilder's mutiny, the *Dolphin* carries gothic overtones as it presents itself to the superstitious sailors as a Flying Dutchman.

In reality, as captain of the *Dolphin*, Heidegger sees himself as a nexus for dissenting souls and land lubbers, his converted slaver providing them with a home and a purpose. With Heidegger being an exile, he is cut off from his roots and as a result has, as Edward Said has said of all exiles, an 'urgent need to reconstitute [his] broken life' by 'choosing to see [himself] as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people'.<sup>20</sup> In Heidegger's own words, which begin to carry Melvillian connotations, the *Dolphin* is described as being an 'asylum for distressed husbands' a 'refuge' for men who feel as if they have been by whatever means made outcasts from conventional mainland society.<sup>21</sup> However, the Rover's ultimate vision is of an America free from British rule, so in some ways the *Dolphin* can be seen as a prototype state of his own making. In Chapter XXVI, when Wilder questions the ability of Heidegger's motley crew to defeat the English forces in battle, the Rover

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<sup>18</sup> *Red Rover* p10-11

<sup>19</sup> *ibid* p. 166 'The "Caroline" now lay within a cable's length...' p.168

<sup>20</sup> Edward Said 'Reflections on Exile' p.286

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid* p.86

responds with an almost poetical advocacy of his crew's suitability which is invested within its cosmopolitan construction.

“See! Here is a Dane, ponderous and steady as the gun at which I shall shortly place him. You may cut him limb from limb, and yet will he stand like a tower, until the last stone of the foundation has been sapped. And here, we have his neighbours, the Swede and the Russ, fit companions for managing the same piece; which, I'll answer, shall not be silent, while a man of them all is left to apply a match, or handle a sponge. Yonder is a square built athletic mariner, from one of the Free Towns. He prefers our liberty to that of his native city; and you shall find that the venerable Hanseatic institutions shall give way sooner than he be known to quit the spot I give him to defend.

Cooper conveys Heidegger's crew through a collection of accepted national caricatures, like the Scotsman depicted as a 'bony miscreant, that has a look of godliness in the midst of all his villainy' persuaded to join the Rover through 'the ambition of becoming rich'. Heidegger continues his speech by referring to some Englishmen enlisted within his ranks:

Here, you see a brace of Englishmen; and, though they come from the island that I love so little, better men at need will not be often found. Feed them, and flog them, and I pledge myself to their swaggering, and their courage.

It is here where we start to get a view of the complications of the Rover's own authoritarian rule. The fact that the Rover can command anybody from any walk of life, so long as he has the means of disciplining and imposing his will upon them. It is through this that the cosmopolitan symbol of the *Dolphin* begins to gain uglier repercussions.

Despite claiming to honour the codes of a gentleman, there is an aggressive streak in Heidegger's nature, which perhaps revels too much in violence for the tastes of Cooper's own genteel manner. For example, we may observe as Wilder does, the grimness of the Rover's smile after he confesses to the killing of his English superior. Further demonstrating this dualism, Heidegger's cabin is described as being decorated with 'a singular admixture of luxury and martial preparation' as well as the 'frowning appendages of war'.<sup>22</sup> It is necessary to note the similarities between the character of the Rover and Mr Gray from *The Pilot* since they are both characters defined by this uneasy dualism between noble motivation and tyrannical wrath. As I discussed in the previous chapter, this dualism represents Cooper's own wariness of the dramatic social upheaval of a revolution and the potential of the so called liberators exerting their own form of tyranny over others. Both characters exist as spirits of rebellion, to defy English rule, and whilst Gray claims equality upon a universal level as 'a citizen of this orb' Heidegger is similarly 'a humble satellite of the mighty sun'.<sup>23</sup> As Philbrick notes, Gray and Heidegger are both defined by an element of tragedy, being victims 'of thwarted ambition' which has rendered them outcasts from society and all the more reactionary against the British.<sup>24</sup>

The main difference between the two lone characters is that whilst Gray exists very much in the periphery as a lowly pilot, the Red Rover takes central stage since he is the captain of the ship. As a result, he holds the authority over every individual aboard his own ship of state and arguably his own tendency towards tyranny can be exercised. In *The Pilot*, Gray is constantly moving behind the scenes to ensure American victory culminating in the one instance in which he demands to be obeyed (his ultimatum: 'One who has a right to order, and who *will* be obeyed!').<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Captain Heidegger assumes absolute power over his motley crew of freebooters.

Another difference between the two characters is that whilst Gray's motivations in the war are questionable, there is more reason behind the Rover's anti-Britishness. Heidegger is infused

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid* p.67

<sup>23</sup> *The Red Rover* P.296

<sup>24</sup> Philbrick *Development of American Sea Fiction* p.62

<sup>25</sup> *The Pilot* p.332

with a sense of liberty and a weariness of British rule as he theorises on the nature of being merely a colonist.

“It is a disheartening thing to be nothing but a dweller in a colony. It keeps down the pride and spirit of a man, and lends a hand in making him what his masters would be glad to have him”.<sup>26</sup>

Heidegger’s problem as a colonist is a sense of detachment from identity, which threatens his own masculinity. As he tells the governess, “we live in a world, and a time, when men cannot be sure even of themselves”.<sup>27</sup> This only enforces the twinned themes of the quest for individual and national identity as well as explaining the Rover’s attraction to danger and his suitability upon the ever changing ocean. In his own words, suspense ‘keeps the faculties from dying, and throws a man upon the better principles of his nature’; it is by this reasoning ‘there is interest even in a mutiny’.<sup>28</sup> Mutiny almost occurs aboard the *Dolphin* during Chapter XX when differences between individuals within Heidegger’s crew and Wilder develop violently. In a highly Byronic vision, the imposing yet romantic form of Rover appears upon deck.<sup>29</sup>

One form, however, was to be distinguished from all around it, by the dignity of its mien and the air of authority that breathed even in the repose of its attitude. It was the Rover, who stood alone, none presuming to approach the spot where he had chosen to plant his light but graceful and imposing person. There was ever an expression of stern investigation in his quick wandering eye, as it roved from object to object in the

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<sup>26</sup> *The Red Rover* P.132

<sup>27</sup> *ibid* p.310

<sup>28</sup> *Red Rover* p.290

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger has been likened to Conrad in Byron’s *The Corsair*. It seems peculiar that Cooper should include a Byronic character especially when many elitists feared the corrupting nature of Byron’s writings particularly on the minds of women. That said, the dramatic crux of Byron’s popular poem is how the villainy of the pirate, his bitter war against men, becomes projected onto the feminine character of Gulnare and how Conrad has to come to terms with the female tyrant he has created.

equipment of the vessel; and at moments, as his loop appeared fastened on some one of the light fleecy clouds that floated in the blue vacuum above him, there gathered about his brow a gloom like that which is thought to be the shadowing of intense thought.<sup>30</sup>

The Rover steps in to quell the disturbance and ends by recruiting Wilder as his second in command, his own authority uncontested ('he no longer seemed to apprehend that it was possible any should be bold enough to dare to plot the overthrow of his power').<sup>31</sup> As Philbrick comments, the Rover 'resembles a trainer in a cage of lions' revelling in danger whenever it may occur, especially if it means he gets to project his own personality over others.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, as a result of his situation in 1759, Heidegger is a more acceptable hero than Gray since he is in essence an oracle, foretelling of a glorious war in which British rule in America is ended. His wisdom is ultimately rewarded and he essentially serves as a character ahead of his time. As Peck says 'he is an outlawed visionary, who alone, sees the course of history'.<sup>33</sup> Whilst the ending of *The Pilot* awkwardly concludes the questionable life of Gray with a sense of purgatory, Heidegger's death is a heroic demise fitting of the character's arc. His years of piracy, in which his sole reason for existence was to defy the English are at least justified by the Revolution and his honourable involvement within it.

The genteel qualities of the Red Rover are also evidenced at many points throughout the novel, be it respect for his female captives or his admiration of Wilder. In one of the many verbal sparring matches between the two characters, the Rover states that 'oaths are made for men who need laws to keep them to their promises' whilst he himself needs 'no more than the clear and

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<sup>30</sup> *The Red Rover* p.254

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid* p.288

<sup>32</sup> Philbrick p.71

<sup>33</sup> John Peck *Maritime Fiction* p.92

unequivocal affirmation of a gentleman'.<sup>34</sup> His discourse with Wilder throughout much of the novel brings out much of Heidegger's humanity. Something that was somewhat lacking in the cold mechanical characterisation of Gray.

As with Griffith and Barnstable in *The Pilot*, Harry Wilder is a stock character of the romantic tradition, the young hero with which Cooper's readers were familiar. However he is clearly distinguished from Griffith due to his situation in 1759. He is not an outlaw nor is he a rebel; he upholds the law, though he exists in the secret world of espionage in the hunt for the eponymous Red Rover. More importantly, Wilder is a British naval officer, though his face is marked by an 'intellectual expression' that according to Cooper was becoming a common trait of American physiognomy.<sup>35</sup> When James Grossman criticises the moral implications raised by the novel, namely 'the ability of decent attractive people to engage in an evil life' he is of course referring to Wilder, who is tasked with the job of hunting down a known pirate but is ultimately won over by the freebooter's errant charm and enlightened political affiliations.<sup>36</sup>

Philbrick likens Wilder to the 'lay figures' of Major Duncan Heyward from *The Last of the Mohicans* and Captain Duncan Uncas Middleton from *The Prairie* who come across as 'all uniform and no brain' led like children through the forest or across the prairie by Bumppo until the last chapter, when they can return to civilization with their fainting brides'.<sup>37</sup> However, we cannot write Wilder's character off completely, because existing in 'a realm of social action' that is Cooper's ocean, Wilder holds a clear distinction over Cooper's lay figures, proving himself as a sailor upon the harsher elements of nature.<sup>38</sup> Indeed this is partly the reason he is held in such high regard by an almost paternalistic Heidegger.

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid* p.79

<sup>35</sup> *Red Rover* p.16

<sup>36</sup> *James Fenimore Cooper: American Man of Letters* (Toronto, William Sloane Associates 1949) p.59

<sup>37</sup> Philbrick *The Development of American Sea Fiction* p.80

<sup>38</sup> Franklin, Wayne *The Early Years* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2007)p.xxv

Wilder's worth is proven at frequent points of the novel, his verbal interactions with the many masquerades of the Rover within Newport harbour for example. However, for every victory there seems to be a failure, particularly in the earlier half of the novel where he is working both for and against the elusive pirate's plotting, 'profoundly, ignorant of the immediate intentions of the Rover'.<sup>39</sup> This occurs most prominently in the scenes leading up to the mutiny aboard the doomed fated voyage of the *Royal Caroline*, which consequently leads to Wilder's informal incarceration aboard the Rover's ship. Wilder is given command of the Caroline (after the original commander is conveniently indisposed by injury), a vessel tasked with transporting the governess and her niece Gertrude Grayson down South. Of course the ship has been marked for capture by the Rover and Wilder attempts everything in his power to stop this from happening. In chapter VIII, Wilder tries to talk Wyllys and Gertrude from travelling aboard the Caroline, working both for and against the Rover as a secret agent, Wilder cannot tell the women that the ship may be captured by pirates, so instead, he tries to label the ship as unseaworthy, commenting upon the imperfections of the ship's rigging ('her top-gallant masts are fiddled abaft')<sup>40</sup>. Unfortunately, his efforts are countered by the words of the old sailor known as Bob Bunt, who is revealed to be one of the many masquerades of the Red Rover. As is often the case, when competing with the Red Rover, Wilder is inept and hopelessly unmatched.

Upon leaving Newport, the Caroline is steered by an almost comically incompetent pilot who puts the vessel on a collision course with the Rover's ship, which lies out towards sea, anchored and unmanned. Wilder takes decisive command of the Royal Caroline booting the ship's ill-advised pilot from his duty. Having instructed the inexperienced pilot to leave the ship and head back for shore, Wilder oversteps the bounds of maritime law (though avoiding disaster) and makes enemies with the crew who will mutiny against him in Chapter XVII. Cooper, as I have made clear at the start of this chapter, has made much of the idyllic nature of the sailor's life, the meditative qualities of the sea and such, but he also reveals the highly superstitious nature of the collective crew. As Cooper

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<sup>39</sup> *Red Rover* p.160

<sup>40</sup> *ibid* p.105



himself comments, superstition is 'a quality that seems indigenous to the ocean'.<sup>41</sup> Cooper's cast of heroes, however, are usually exempt from this type of behaviour, being more susceptible to reason and scientific explanation to explain otherwise strange phenomena. This occurs most singularly in Chapter XIV when a strange vessel is seen sailing in the distance with unnatural speed. Wilder knows that it is the Red Rover's ship spurred on by strong winds, as a result of the oncoming storm, but his crew are taken in by the illusion of a phantom ship and so become entranced with a sense of 'superstitious awe'.<sup>42</sup> When the storm does come, Wilder has no choice but to order the ship's masts be cut so as to combat the threat of capsizing. Effectively a floating husk, the Rover's ship 'like a dark image' suddenly enters the scene, gliding by the *Caroline*, with sails intact with not a single member of the crew in sight, after which it disappears into the stormy mist.<sup>43</sup> For Wilder's crew, this apparent supernatural phenomena sparks the mutiny: 'succeeded by one single moment of breathless wavering silence among the crew; and then the common cry, and the general rush of every man upon our defenceless and solitary adventurer'.<sup>44</sup> Luckily for Wilder, Gertrude's femininity ('a fearful cry') is enough to quell the 'savage intentions' of the mutineers, direct violence is avoided and the crew abandon ship, leaving Wilder with his women aboard the sinking ship. Luckily, and as predicted, the next morning, they are intercepted and taken aboard the *Dolphin*, now captives of the Red Rover. As a proving ground, the ocean tests Wilder, but in the tradition of ill fated literary voyages, everything that can go wrong does go wrong. Equipped with a spooked and ultimately incompetent crew he does his utmost to defend the ship against the sheer awesome forces of nature, against which he is of course helpless.

The maritime drifter Harry Wilder is eventually made complete when he is correctly identified as Henry de Lacey in Chapter XXXI. It almost seems disappointing for Cooper to adhere to the conventional romantic tradition after creating such a sea worthy character. In terms of character, the name Wilder registers with the character's heroism as an outlying supranational

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid p.198

<sup>42</sup> Ibid p.197

<sup>43</sup> Ibid p.223

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p227

presence upon the ocean, whilst comparatively, the effeminate naming of de Lacey seems to pander towards the character's newly found status in the upper classes of civilised society. In a novel where British autocracy is seen to be the enemy, it is strange that Wilder should be confirmed as the son of a nobleman, an Admiral of the British navy no less. His marriage to Gertrude is once again symptomatic of the domestic qualification that is typical of British romances or how the English rose becomes a kind of highly sought after commodity that promotes social status. It demonstrates 'the exclusive nature of the patriarchal prerogative' channelling English blood from the father through the daughter and hopefully into a worthy suitor.<sup>45</sup> It seems that Cooper's inherent genteel sensibilities are impeding the revolutionary sentiment of the narrative, the very Americanness of the tale is complicated by Wilder's transition into De Lacey.

Gertrude is 'certainly very pretty and proper', essentially providing Wilder with a conventional and happy ending. The 'true love story of the narrative', as Susan Fenimore Cooper reveals in her 1861 preface, is between the common sailors Dick Fid and Scipio Africanus.<sup>46</sup> In the previous chapter, I illustrated how Tom Coffin as a common sailor proved to be something of an outlier, becoming as Philbrick notes one of Cooper's 'ideal seamen'. Whilst, as Berger enthuses, Coffin's supranationality threatened to compromise the novel's nationalist narrative, *The Red Rover's* common sailor pairing are more tightly tethered to the novel's structure. Knowing Wilder to be of noble birth, they exist to function as guardians of their young master, and so adhere to a conventional class based hierarchy.<sup>47</sup> Wilder leads, and they follow.

However, there is something radical about these characters, in that they are essentially a multiracial pairing. Much like Ishmael and Queequeg, S'ip and Fid function as a pair of bickering bosom buddies. Initially, Cooper presents the two characters almost as duplicates of one another,

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<sup>45</sup> Nancy Armstrong 'Why Daughters Die: the Racial Logic of American Sentimentalism' *The Yale Journal of Criticism* Vol. 7 No.2 1994 p.10

<sup>46</sup> Susan Fenimore Cooper's 1861 preface to *The Red Rover* (New York, W.A. Townsend and Co Edition) p.178

<sup>47</sup> Midway through the novel, during Wilder's outing aboard the Royal Caroline, the duo are largely absent having been held hostage aboard the *Dolphin*, concentrating the plot on Wilder.

both are of middle age and both appear as if 'furnished [by] the strongest proofs of long exposure to the severity of climate, and to numberless tempests'.<sup>48</sup> Dick Fid, in his mannerisms, echoes the common sailors of Smollett sharing the traits of 'argumentative dogmatism, superstitious ignorance, carefree irresponsibility and blind obedience to the commands of superiors'.<sup>49</sup> He argues with S'ip in a 'harsh, positive tone' at once attacking him upon racial grounds but also respectful of the man's prowess as a mariner ("The Lord made a nigger an unrational animal; and an experienced seaman, who has doubled both Capes, and made all the head-lands between Fundy and Horn"), which elevates S'ip over most men of his racial standings.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, Fid is immensely respectful of his lifelong partner as he reveals to both the Rover and Mrs Wyllys:

...although his colour is no whiter than the back of a whale, I care not who knows it, after master Harry, there is no man living who has an honester way with him, or in whose company I take greater satisfaction.<sup>51</sup>

James D. Wallace likens the pair to Cooper's most famous interracial duo of Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook in Cooper's *Leather Stocking* pentology, constantly debating on the most efficient ways of surviving against the overwhelming forces of nature.<sup>52</sup> They are made equal by their situation and proximity to nature.

Scipio, himself holds perhaps more relevance to the modern reader of *The Red Rover* since he is a black sailor who fulfils a prominent role within the narrative. As Wallace says there is an inherent danger in combining the words "black" and "sailor" because they are 'likely to evoke flogging and impressment' especially in regards to the Rover, characteristically armed with a whip

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<sup>48</sup> *Red Rover* p.17

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Philbrick *The Development of American Sea Fiction* p.81

<sup>50</sup> *ibid* p.20

<sup>51</sup> *ibid* p.328

<sup>52</sup> James D. Wallace 'The Black Sailor and *The Red Rover*' in *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art: Papers from the 1995 Cooper Seminar (No.10)* ed. by Hugh C. MacDougall (p.85-92) p.85

and in command of an ex-slaver.<sup>53</sup> In Chapter II, we are introduced to S'ip as he arrives in Newport with Fid and Wilder.

His features were more elevated than common; his eye was mild, easily excited to joy, like that of his companion somewhat humorous. His head was beginning to be sprinkled with gray, his skin had lost the shining jet colour which had distinguished it in his youth, and all his limbs and movements bespoke a man whose frame had been equally indurated and stiffened by unremitting toil.<sup>54</sup>

Wallace goes on to remind us that Cooper had included African American characters in earlier novels, characters such as Ceasar in *The Spy* and Agamemnon in *The Pioneers*. However, whilst these ironically named characters serve only to add colour to their respected narratives, Wallace argues that Scipio is something more substantial. Although 'he is conventionalised in many ways, speaking a "stage-negro" dialect and displaying an unyielding devotion to Wilder, S'ip also has larger dimensions of strength and heroism'.<sup>55</sup> Effectively Cooper's black sailor lies between the two extremes of Wilder's gentility and the wrathful force of Heidegger and comes to represent 'growth, responsible change, and transformation'.<sup>56</sup> Whilst Cooper has Coffin make an active choice to go down with the *Ariel*, Scipio's demise fulfils a more pivotal role within the narrative, certifying Wilder's birthright as Henry de Lacey in Chapter XXXI.

From an historical perspective, the black sailor was an instrumental part of the motley crew movement that rebelled against British authority throughout the Revolutionary era. 'Runaway slaves and free people of colour flocked to the ports in search of sanctuary and a money wage and took work as labourers and sea men' whilst gangs of sailors were only too happy to indoctrinate

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid p.86

<sup>54</sup> *Red Rover* p.18

<sup>55</sup> James D. Wallace 'The Black Sailor and *The Red Rover*' p.85

<sup>56</sup> Ibid p. 92

excess slaves from overflowing plantations into their own forms of political protest.<sup>57</sup> The involvement of African Americans at sea in many ways gave rise to the abolitionist movement. Olaudah Equiano's autobiographical slave narrative caused a stir in British society by illuminating the humanitarian crisis that was the slave trade.<sup>58</sup> Equiano was responsible for bringing the case of the slave ship *Zong* to the forefront of British politics, an event where over a hundred shackled slaves were thrown overboard in an attempt for the ship's masters to claim insurance on their cargo.

Cooper was clearly aligned with the abolitionist movement.. *The Dolphin*, is a converted slaver. Seeing it from onboard the *Caroline*, Gertrude and Mrs Wyllys remark on the apparent beauty of the vessel ('It is indeed a beautiful ship!"158?) but when Wilder states that it is in fact a slaver, it arouses a very different reaction from Gertrude.

"A slaver! How deceitful then is all her beauty and symmetry! I will never trust to appearances again, since so lovely an object can be devoted to so vile a purpose."<sup>59</sup>

Once again this highlights a problem with Cooper's maritime nationalism, since he cannot condone the actions of the slave trade, despite the huge impact it had upon American maritime commerce and his own desires to unite the American people through maritime nationalism.

Philbrick has commented on how Cooper's portrayal of American ships are not necessarily chosen for their military might, but more for their speed and prowess upon the ocean ('the small, swift, and graceful vessels of America'), in effect serving as symbols of freedom and modernity.<sup>60</sup> As well as this, as Peck professes, Cooper's ships evoke the competitive capitalist nature of American maritime enterprise at this point in history, existing confidently in the shadow of the might of the British navy thereby emphasising Cooper's insistence upon maritime nationalism in conjunction with

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<sup>57</sup> Peter Linebaugh/Marcus Rediker *The Many-Headed Hydra* (Verso London 2007)p.226

<sup>58</sup> *The Interesting Narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano* contains many episodes detailing not just the barbarity (as in floggings and hangings) faced by slaves and black sailors but also white sailors as well, further giving evidence to the harsh circumstances of a life at sea.

<sup>59</sup> *Red Rover* p.159

<sup>60</sup> Philbrick *Development of American Sea Fiction* p.50

the accepted forms of English literature. Whilst both these analogies can readily be applied to the schooner *Ariel* or *The Water Witch*, it works less well with *The Red Rover* since it is a slaver. Peck enthuses that the Rover is a symbol of freedom 'it is like a dolphin as it cuts through the water, like an animated being' alluding to the fact that it is a converted slaver, not a slaver by purpose and so reflective of a kind of greater change, an emblem of abolition.<sup>61</sup> When we consider that in 1807 the British had passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, the Rover's ship acts as a lingering reminder of the continued administration of America's own regime of suppression. Undoubtedly this further illustrates the hypocritical repercussions of the Rover's own ideology, as he incessantly chants the virtues of freedom and liberty. As has already been seen, the Rover relishes in command of his ship, the bondage of 'the outcasts of the earth'.

The climax of the novel is undoubtedly the death of Scipio. After the battle between the *Dolphin* and the *Dart* and having found out Wilder's true identity as an agent of the throne, Heidegger orders the trio to be hung as traitors. Naturally, as the pirates approach the adventurers, Scipio dies in unflinching defence of Wilder, his partially clothed body victim to the sharp cutting weapons of war: 'empty handed he fought with his brawny arms, like one who despised the cuts, thrusts and assaults, of which his athletic frame immediately became the helpless subject'.<sup>62</sup> Cooper's tastes are adverse to scenes of overt violence, but in this scene in particular there is an emphasis upon the horror of war, as Wilder is 'left to gaze on the wreck of all the boasted powers of his cruiser, and on that waste of human life' as men lay dead 'in their blood... with such gleamings of ferocity on their countenances as plainly denoted that the current of their meditations was still running on vengeance'.<sup>63</sup> The British are subject to an overwhelming defeat, and at the forefront of this scene is the form of the Rover, the survivors of battle existing purely at the mercy of his wrath; 'so absolute [is] his power' he effectively decides who lives and who dies.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> John Peck *Maritime Fiction* p.92

<sup>62</sup> *Red Rover* p.419

<sup>63</sup> *ibid* p.421

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid* p.422

Dick Fid's reaction to his partner's demise could also be read as a standout moment. After life leaves Scipio's body ('with a convulsive movement of that herculean arm which he had so lately and so successfully brandished in defence of his master, the limb stiffened and fell, though the eyes still continued their affectionate and glaring gaze on that countenance he had so long loved') the pirates move to throw the carcass overboard.<sup>65</sup> In a defiant response, Fid lashes his own body with that of the black, effectively tying together living and dead, black and white, so that Cooper has at least created a lasting image of racial equality. This, of course, is not enough to stop the bloodshed; the final and most pivotal part of Scipio's death is the certification of Wilder's true identity as written upon a dog tag found upon S'ip's body.<sup>66</sup> In a rather bleakly humorous development of plot, the tag was taken from a dog aboard the ship *Ark of Lynnhaven* in which Wilder, as a baby, was found, an unfortunate canine who twenty-four years ago was killed and eaten by none other than Fid and Scipio to combat the risk of starvation.<sup>67</sup> It is the dogtag that Mrs Wyllys recognises and she is thus finally made aware that Wilder is her long lost son. With this sudden revelation, the fate of Fid and Wilder is secured, as the Rover cannot in good conscience have Wilder executed in front of his long lost mother, and this day of bloodshed comes to an end.

John Peck is critical of this scene, which seems to build to a point and ends rather anticlimactically in a style that is typical of Cooper's writing. At the point at which Wilder is about to be hung (perhaps rightfully depending on who we sympathise with), Heidegger backs down 'just as Cooper himself always seems to back down at such moments'.<sup>68</sup> The conclusion of the novel occurs very quickly leads to 'an entire change, in the scene and character of our tale', with the Rover

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid* p.430

<sup>66</sup> *ibid* p.433 the tag's inscription reads 'Neptune, the property of Paul de Lacey'.

<sup>67</sup> It is in Chapter XXIV in which Fid and Scipio, rather than resorting to cannibalism by eating the baby Wilder decide to eat the dog "we kept our teeth jogging on the skin of the dog, though I will not say that the food was over savoury". It seems quite ludicrous how Wilder's noble identity is secured through the instinctive decision of Fid and Scipio. *Red Rover* p.333

<sup>68</sup> John Peck *Maritime Fiction* p.93

granting Wilder and his comrades freedom from their incarceration and more importantly the destruction of the *Dolphin* itself.<sup>69</sup>

Suddenly a streak of flame flashed from her decks, springing fiercely from sail to sail. A vast cloud of smoke broke out of the hull and then there came the deadened roar of artillery. To this succeeded, for a time, the awful, and yet attractive spectacle of a burning ship.<sup>70</sup>

With the Rover's voluntary destruction of the *Dolphin*, Cooper effectively washes his hands of Heidegger's potentially nightmarish state and grooms the exiled towards the path of redemption. In losing Scipio, Wilder has effectively lost a member of his family, but obviously gains another through the discovery of his mother. Most importantly the death of Scipio gives Wilder a place in conventional society, he marries Gertrude and as we see twenty years later, he has a son. Any illusions of the supranational that Wilder had as a sailor upon the oceanic element are washed away as he takes his place within upper class society.

This, however, is Cooper's intention with *The Red Rover*, a leaner novel that is preoccupied with the nationalist narrative, where the quest for individual identity is coupled with the gain of a national identity. *The Red Rover* is as Philbrick says, defined by the dominating theme of Cooper's nautical trilogy where the 'free and daring life of the sea becomes equated with the promise of political identity and liberty, as if the values of the seaman's calling necessitated the eventual self-realisation of a people so thoroughly maritime as the Americans'.<sup>71</sup> With the novel's final chapter, Newport has been liberated by American forces, and where the *Dolphin* was once anchored there is 'a gallant frigate' flying 'a flag of intermingled colours, and bearing a constellation of bright and rising stars'.

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<sup>69</sup> *Red Rover* p.435

<sup>70</sup> *ibid* p.437

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Philbrick *The Development of American Sea Fiction* p.58



Heidegger has the flag he so long cherished. It is a fitting end, after the awkward conclusion of *The Pilot*. *The Red Rover* emphasises a sense of community compared to the sterility and sombreness of the Griffith homestead. All major characters of the novel are reunited within Wilder's homestead. All prior actions, from the piracy, to Heidegger's wrath, to the double crossing are ultimately justified in the formation of the new republic.

Despite Cooper's own convictions about his second sea novel, supposedly 'the most maritime novel of English literature' *The Red Rover* still adheres to the conservative rudiments of the genre of the historical romance. It is still wary of the repercussions of the immense social upheaval of splitting from Great Britain and it is still in a sense fairly conservative in its focus. Where the life of an American hero like Heidegger or Wilder are so actively displayed at sea, they are ultimately brought to a close within a domestic environment. Mediation is controlled and the upper middle class social hierarchy is safely preserved.

## Chapter 3.

### *The Water Witch: The Hermaphrodite Brig in a Hermaphrodite Novel.*

“But, Sir, this brigantine and her character are little known to you. We have no need of truant damsels, to let us into the mystery of the sex’s taste; for a female spirit guides all our humors, and imparts something of her delicacy to all our acts, even though it be the fashion among burghers to call them lawless.”

James Fenimore Cooper *The Water Witch* 1830<sup>1</sup>

I refer to Cooper’s third sea novel, *The Water Witch* as a hermaphrodite novel partly out of respect for the brigantine of the novel’s title. The vessel piloted by the fabled Skimmer of the Seas is a ship of a dual construction that combines the strength of a military brig with the speed of a schooner and is thusly described as a ‘Hermaphrodite’ brig, possessing both masculine and feminine qualities.<sup>2</sup>

Much like the ship itself, the novel is also of a dual construction, possessing literary qualities that we may also describe as feminine and masculine. It is this aspect of the novel which Hugh Egan defines ‘how the manly world of the sea and the domestic world of the shore interpenetrate’ that I should like to discuss within this chapter.<sup>3</sup>

The lack of widespread critical analysis of Cooper’s sea fiction is both a hindrance and an advantage to any scholar of the ‘American Scott’. Yet, whilst both *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover* have shared a scattered and resurgent sense of interest through the decades, as represented by the works of Philbrick, Peck and Berger, Cooper’s third novel, *The Water Witch* has had considerably less analytical interest. James Grossman labels *The Water Witch* as ‘absurd’ with the hermaphrodite brig

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<sup>1</sup> James Fenimore Cooper *The Water Witch, or, The Skimmer of the Seas: A Tale* (reprint from the 1852 version of the novel as contained within the complete works of J. Fenimore Cooper in one volume ed. by George P. Putnam - The Michigan Historical Reprint series, printed in Great Britain 2007) p.186

<sup>2</sup> ‘Partaking of the double character of brig and schooner, the sails and spars of the forward-mast being of the former, while those of the after-mast were of the latter construction, seamen have given to this class of shipping the familiar name of Hermaphrodites.’ *The Water Witch* p.168

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Egan ‘Cooper and His Contemporaries’ in *America and the Sea: A Literary History* ed. by Haskell Springer (Athens and London, University of Georgia Press 1995) p.70

of the novel's title coming to stand as 'a symbol of unreality'.<sup>4</sup> Philbrick, as has been noted in the previous chapter, has also commented on Cooper's inclusion of the fantastical in his novel, departing 'from the hypothetical norm represented by *The Red Rover*' and noting how 'Cooper's concern with the fictional representation of maritime activities is rivalled by his interest in re-creating the supernatural and dream-like mood of *The Tempest* and in rhetorical experimentation'.<sup>5</sup> In his retrospective preface, Cooper notes how the book had proven to be 'a comparative failure', and whilst proclaiming in the third person that *The Water Witch* is 'the most imaginative book ever written by the author' its main fault lay in 'blending too much of the real with the purely ideal'.<sup>6</sup> The novel goes to great lengths in establishing 'the real' through its setting within New York in the early years of the eighteenth century, but ultimately complicates it with the energy of high romance represented by the smuggler brig of the novel's title, which brings an air of elusive gender in an otherwise highly masculinised environment.

In her 1861 preface to the novel, Susan Fenimore Cooper outlines similar criticism of her father's third sea novel though identifying with an admirable romantic aesthetic in its use of landscape.

This was rather a drama of the coast than a tale of the sea; the movements of the vessels being confined entirely to the waters connected with the harbour of New York. If less brilliant than "The Red Rover," the spirit and interest which pervade "The Water Witch" are still very striking;

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<sup>4</sup> James Grossman *James Fenimore Cooper: The American Man of Letters Series* (Toronto, William Sloane Associates 1949) p.71

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Philbrick *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press 1961) p.55 Cooper's eye for consistent nautical realism that so marked both *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover* is less of a prominent concern in *The Water Witch*. This can be read as Cooper pandering towards the tastes of the more common reader who found the nautical details slightly alienating through Cooper's delight in the 'mystification of jargon' as Grossman puts it. This is not to say that nautical practice is completely absent from the novel, more that Cooper found himself more flexible in use of his details in furthering the narrative in such a way that would make sense to the average reader though it might cause an experienced seaman to grumble. In 1917, Robert Neeser, secretary of New York City's naval society commented that all 'incidents presented by Cooper are good and show a thorough technical knowledge, with perhaps allowable element of exaggeration'. *Cooper's Sea Tales* as found online at (<http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/nyhistory/1917nyhistory-neeser.html>) accessed upon the 8<sup>th</sup> July 2009

<sup>6</sup> James Fenimore Cooper 'preface' to *The Water Witch* 1852 edition ed. by George Putman

there is an atmosphere of romance infused into the narrative, singularly different from the sober coloring of Puritan life in “The Wish-ton-Wish.” It is strikingly picturesque also, more so than most works from the same pen. But on the other hand, there is less of high moral tone in the book than was usual with Mr. Cooper; it carries a carnival aspect about it; the shell was gay and brilliant, the kernel was less nourishing than usual.<sup>7</sup>

As George Dekker notes, so striking was Cooper’s romantic conception within *The Water Witch* that the New-York Mirror ‘counselled Cooper to abandon such plodding subjects as colonial New York and write a true romance – about American buccaneering in the West Indies!’<sup>8</sup>

To define the emphasis upon ‘the purely ideal’ it is necessary to emphasise the effect of Italy upon the mind of the author. First published in Germany in 1830, *The Water Witch* was written whilst Cooper was residing in Italy. Cooper and his family had left the United States for France in 1826, a migration that he and his wife had planned since the release of *The Pioneers* in 1823.<sup>9</sup> Abroad, as Allan M. Axelrad has stated, Cooper could enjoy ‘his wife’s companionship’ as well as an array of ‘cosmopolitan conventions’ but perhaps most important was the celebrity status of being a widely read American author in Europe.<sup>10</sup> Although writing to supposedly collect and unify the minds of the American people, Cooper was widely read across Europe to the point of

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<sup>7</sup> Susan Fenimore Cooper - *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper* (New York W.A. Townsend and Co. 1861 ) p231.

<sup>8</sup> George Dekker ‘Introduction’ to *James Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage* (London And Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1973) p.9

<sup>9</sup> Max I. Baym gives more detail of Cooper’s European travels : ‘On July 18, 1826, Fenimore Cooper arrived in France and after a two year stay there he crossed the Alps to spend the Winter and Spring in Florence and its vicinity. In the summer of 1829 he sailed down to the coast of Naples. A three-month stay in Sorrento followed. Then, after spending the winter of 1829-30 in Rome, he resorted to Venice during the spring. Thence he journeyed to Munich by the Tyrol and finally settled down in Dresden. While there the July Revolution broke out in Paris, but this did not deter him from making that city his residence until his return to America in 1833’ - *The Odyssey of The Water Witch and a Susan Fenimore Cooper Letter* first published in *New York History*, Vol.II, No.1 (January 1970) p.33-41 – available online at the James Fenimore Cooper Society Website [http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/nyhistory/1970nyhistory-baym.html#note\\*](http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/nyhistory/1970nyhistory-baym.html#note*) accessed (4<sup>th</sup> July 2009)

<sup>10</sup> Allan M. Axelrad ‘*The Shock of Recognition: Twain and Lawrence Read Cooper*’ in *Reading Cooper, Teaching Cooper* ed. by Jeffrey Walker (New York, AMS Press, 2007) p.59

‘Coopermania’.<sup>11</sup> This migration marks a defining transition period in the novelist’s life and literary career.<sup>12</sup> As Franklin says, Cooper would return to American shores in 1833 a decidedly different person; ‘sharper culturally, deeper politically’ and ‘shrewder (if not yet cynical) in moral terms’ to the point in which there can be observed a visible split between man and country.

Although *The Water Witch* is set around the shores of Staten Island and deeply entrenched within the localised history of eighteenth century America, Susan Fenimore Cooper gives the impression of the novel being more a product of the Italian landscape; the novel’s very creation is said to have been inspired by ‘the sight of the Mediterranean’.<sup>13</sup> The small villages and country houses, literally clinging to the dramatic rocky scenery of the Italian coast implied the ‘extreme watchfulness of [the] European governments on points connected with customs’ and roused the exciting possibilities of the addition of a smuggler craft to the novel.<sup>14</sup> In spirit, it is not difficult to associate *The Water Witch* with the novelist’s temporal residence within the Villa Tasso in Sorrento which overlooked the Bay of Naples and Mount Vesuvius. Compared to the ‘greens and greys of the American coastline’, Cooper found tremendous aesthetic satisfaction in ‘the purple and blue’ of the Italian coastline.<sup>15</sup> Axelrad has gone so far as to say that this picturesque location from which Cooper’s third nautical romance was written was ‘an aesthetic epiphany’ for the novelist as ‘a

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<sup>11</sup> Following *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper enjoyed much popularity throughout Europe, in a process defined by Ray Allen Billington as ‘Coopermania’. Popular in France, Britain and Russia Cooper was the most translated author in Germany. Ray Allen Billington *Land of Savagery; Land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier in the Nineteenth Century* (New York; London, W.W Norton 1981) p.30-32\_

<sup>12</sup> Along with his tales regarding the Indian, the settler and the sailor Helen Phinit-Akson has suggested a fourth category within Cooper’s canon that specifically deals with religion (‘his spiritual vision of man’s responsibility as a finite creature in an infinite universe’) and is purely inspired by the author’s time spent in Europe and his fond appreciation of Renaissance art and architecture. This fourth category comprises of eight books that span the course of his literary career from *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish* to *The Sea Lions*. *Ritual and Aesthetic: The Influence of Europe upon the Art of James Fenimore Cooper* (Bangkok, Thammasat University press, 1976)

<sup>13</sup> Susan Fenimore Cooper *Pages and Pictures*, preface to *The Water Witch* p.222 ‘The sight of the Mediterranean, enjoyed during the winter journey to Marseilles, had suggested the idea of another sea tale.’

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p.229

<sup>15</sup> Brooks, Van Wyck *The Dream of Arcadia American Writers and Artists in Italy 1760-1915* (New York, E.P. Dutton & Co. 1958)p.59

literary landscape artist'.<sup>16</sup> In such a way, *The Water Witch* reflects the potential realisation of the European landscape, 'blessed', as Axelrad suggests, 'with picturesque associations, vertical features, [that were] well suited to the gothic mode -- unlike his own land' of New England.<sup>17</sup> Unusually, the Alderman's holiday retreat, The Lust in the Rust, is located in a similar scenic setting off the coastline of the Hudson; of course, the natural beauty hides the practical purpose of the villa's location which allows the Dutch trader to conduct illegal business with the smugglers.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the villa represents the cosmopolitan aspect of the novel in the fact that we have characters of European and African extraction. Akin to *The Tempest*, the novel looks eastward to Europe and effectively becomes an international novel that happens to be set on Long Island.<sup>19</sup>

Discussion of this novel lies within this dynamic between the real and the purely ideal. Cooper is still writing in the vein of the historical romance, but his attachment to nautical romance dominates the historical context he attempts to establish. It is a reversal of what we have seen in *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover*. *The Water Witch* is essentially a retelling of *The Red Rover* with a similar quest for identity through a sense of establishing some form of political independence. Effectively told in a timeframe when the 'reality' of everyday life was directly associated with British rule, 'when being a good American meant being a good Englishman'.<sup>20</sup> The main difference that distinguishes

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<sup>16</sup> 'If Cooper -- as a literary landscape artist -- had an aesthetic epiphany, it happened in Italy at the Bay of Naples: perhaps under a sudden spell of extraordinary enchantment, like that sunset on the Island of Ischia; or, perhaps more gradually in a splendid every day setting such as Villa Tasso's in Sorrento where he lived. It was on the terrace of the villa, perched romantically on a cliff -- with a fabulous view of the Bay of Naples -- that most of *The Water-Witch* was written (p.8).' Allan M. Axelrad 'Epiphany at Ischia: The Effect on Italy on James Fenimore Cooper's Literary Landscape Painting' as published within *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art* Vol. 1 No. 9 (1993) p.1-27 available from the James Fenimore Cooper Society website

<sup>17</sup> Ibid p.8 As a most valuable note, Axelrad marks *The Water Witch* as distinct from *The Red Rover*: 'The initial books he published while living in Europe -- *Prairie* (1827), *Red Rover* (1827), *Notions of the Americans* (1828), *Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* (1829) -- had New World settings, as in part did *Water-Witch*. But also partly set abroad, *Water-Witch* sharply distinguished between America's "new," low lying, densely forested coast, and Italy's, which "teems with the recollections of three thousand years," backed by "ragged and rocky mountains, with the indescribable play of golden and rosy light upon their broken surfaces." Unmindful that he had just begun to differentiate, Cooper stated that only those with "fertile brains" would fail to see the difference.'

<sup>18</sup> 'There was a young moon, and a firmament glowing with a myriad of stars. The light was shed softly on the water, though here and there the ocean glittered with its rays'. *The Water Witch* p.82

<sup>19</sup> Kay Seymour House, *Cooper's Americans* (Ohio State University Press 1965) p.97

<sup>20</sup> Hugh Egan 'Cooper and His Contemporaries' p.70

*The Water Witch* over Cooper's previous sea novels is the theme of elusive gender, where femininity plays a larger role within the narrative and is not necessarily confined to the homestead.

One of the defining characteristics of *The Water Witch*, is as Philbrick has commented, how 'the characterization of ships reaches its fullest development', the brig of the novel's title suggesting an air of feminine freedom:

The brigantine pursues no set purpose but ranges the seas at the whim of her commander, defying the rules and conventions of society. She is resourceful, independent, spirited, daring – everything that orthodox criticism finds wanting in Cooper's female characters.<sup>21</sup>

Within this chapter I should like to build upon this, since in light of contemporary criticism of Cooper and especially in regards to *The Water Witch* itself, Cooper's binaries of gender are never as clear cut as Philbrick makes out and this very much complicates the transatlantic situation that was perhaps easier to read in both *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover*. I would also go on to suggest that more of Cooper's nautical tropes reach a fuller sense of development; from the banal middle hero of Ludlow, to Seadrift, the woman in disguise, and finally the fabled Skimmer of the Seas himself, the godlike Tom Tiller. The finale of the novel, in which Cooper fittingly brings his trilogy of nautical romances to a close, is also a mark of his development as a writer of the seas and a fulfilment of the supranational romance of the sea that has been suppressed in his first two books.

Set in and around New York during the 1710s, *The Water Witch* as Philbrick has said is a novel 'designed to show the first stirrings of what was to become a nation of singular boldness and originality in all that relates to navigation'. Van Beverout and the crew of the free-trading brigantine chafe under the restrictions imposed by their English governors, and their desire for commercial

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Philbrick *The Development of American Sea Fiction* p.76-77

freedom becomes identified with a yearning for political independence'.<sup>22</sup> The plot concerns a pair of Dutch traders Alderman Myndert Van Beverout (a capitalist through and through) and Oloff Van Staats (a character who functions simplistically as a fool) and their liaison with the captain of the elusive *Water Witch*, the smuggler known only as the Skimmer of the Seas. Interestingly, it is important to consider how the novel deals with the Dutch and the British, as opposed to the Americans and British. Originally, New Amsterdam in the early Seventeenth Century, functioned as a Dutch fur-trading colony until it was conquered by the British in 1664 and renamed New York. Most of the characters in the novel descend from Dutch ancestry, perhaps most prominent is Van Beverout, a lucrative fur trader effectively serving as a remnant of New York's past. Essentially the Dutch traders and the smugglers work together to evade the strict trading laws imposed by British rule, who in this case are represented by the novel's middle hero Captain Cornelius Van Cuyler Ludlow commander of the über masculine vessel *Coquette* as well as the notable inclusion of the corrupt and disgraced governor of New York, Lord Cornbury.<sup>23</sup> That said, Ludlow too, is of Dutch extraction and though enlisted in the British navy, his family has been known in the past for 'plotting against the crown', and are therefore written off by Cornbury as 'formers of discord, disturbers of the public mind, and captious disputants about prerogatives and vested rights'.<sup>24</sup> We are supposed to sympathise with the Dutch traders, though they are effectively remnants of the past, unable to contest the might of the British Empire. The Dutch are another portrayal of a dispossessed people, but we are made to sympathise with them through their wily capitalist endeavour that leads them

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid* p.56

<sup>23</sup> Lord Cornbury (1661-1723), also known as Edward Hyde, was appointed governor of New York City and New Jersey between the years 1701 to 1708 by Queen Anne. An eccentric personality who apparently relished in cross dressing, the colonists literally sent him back to England in 1708 after it was found that he was guilty of corruption. During Cooper's time, Cornbury would of course still hold all the negative connotations of being one of the worst governors imposed by the British on an American colony, as illustrated by historian George Bancroft. Recently, Patricia U. Bonomi's *Lord Cornbury Scandal: The Politics of Reputation in British America* has questioned the historical portrayal of the shamed governor. Lord Cornbury has also become something of a role model for transvestite culture and lifestyle (The Cornbury Society).

<sup>24</sup> *The Water Witch* p.20 'These Ludlows, Sir, people that fled the realm for plotting against the crown, are offensive to the loyal subject'.



into negotiations with the crew of motley freebooters.<sup>25</sup> Their collected practice of smuggler in the face of imposed British trading laws is the basis of a kind of revolutionary rebellion. Since, however, their trade is defined by material goods they sidestep the violent underpinnings of Gray and Heidegger.

The novel begins, as ever, with Cooper as historian/geographer, illustrating the physical situation of the Hudson's estuary and the natural advantage it provides the island of Manhattan for maritime commerce. Perhaps more than ever, Cooper is familiar with the book's setting having negotiated the Hudson as a midshipman aboard the *Stirling* in his youth as well as residing within New York City for much of his early literary career. Since the story is set over a century before its publication, Manhattan is a place that is described as being scarcely recognisable to the modern reader, not yet the sprawling urban cultural centre ('the forest of masts, the miles of wharves, the countless villas') that it would inevitably become.<sup>26</sup> Within this setting, we are introduced to the Alderman and his recreational motivations to retreat to his villa the *Lust in the Rust* (located towards the mouth of the Hudson) with his business partner Van Staats and his nubile niece Alida de Barbérie. He intends Van Staats to court Alida and thereby strengthen his own economic ties through their marriage. Unfortunately, Alida has eyes only for Ludlow who makes a friendly appearance during their voyage down river, in which they also encounter a mysterious seaman dressed in an Indian shawl. This is revealed much later to be Tom Tiller, the heroic protagonist of the novel and master of the smuggler *The Water Witch*, which is known to be in the area and relentlessly (though ineffectually) hunted by Ludlow.

Much like *The Pilot* as 'a tale of the coast', the duration of *The Water Witch's* narrative flips between land and sea as Alida is captured by *The Water Witch* and Ludlow's task to hunt the

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<sup>25</sup> Kay Seymore House, briefly comments on Cooper's sympathetic use of 'the disappearing Dutch' early in his literary career with *The Water Witch* and then much later with the *Redskin* trilogy (*Satanstoe* 1845, *Chainbearer* 1845 and *The Redskin* 1846). 'Here he sympathetically portrayed people who were being dispossessed by the ruthlessly commercial types and downright thieves... Parts of the Dutch pleasures are robust and their excesses are not beyond criticism, but their indulgences lead to their granting their slaves freedoms and responsibilities that were largely unknown on southern plantations.' 'Is Fenimore Cooper Obsolete?' in *Reading Cooper, Teaching Cooper* ed. by Jeffrey Walker (New York, AMS Press, Inc. 2007) p.27

<sup>26</sup> *The Water Witch* p.2

freebooters becomes all the more personal. At the same time, Van Beverout fulfils an awkward position between his shady alliance with the smugglers and the apprehension of his beloved niece. After the nautical scenes of Cooper's first two sea novels, *The Water Witch* becomes the epitome of unsurpassed sailing prowess evading the British *Coquette* miraculously at every turn during the chase that begins in Chapter 17 (indeed, it is the vessel's ability to perform such miracles that adds to the tale's unbelievability).<sup>27</sup> Tiller's crew has a larger role to play in this novel, we are led to believe that his right hand man (who is actually a woman) Master Seadrift, is in fact the fabled Skimmer of the Seas as he masquerades with a commanding presence. Ludlow gains the upperhand momentarily by capturing Seadrift, but all is lost when he pursues the *Water Witch* through the infamous stretch of water known as Hell's Gate. In blind chase, the *Coquette* unwittingly becomes the victim of French warships, successfully defeating one but faced with another two. It is here that Tiller intervenes in a fairly selfless manner and provides valuable manpower to Ludlow. The result is a victory but the destruction of the *Coquette* by fire and a subsequent explosion, leaving the survivors abandoned at sea onboard a makeshift raft. After a harrowing scene, in which one of the sailors is attacked and killed by a shark, the survivors are picked up by the *Water-Witch*. After this, a lengthy scene of discourse between Van Beverout and Tiller seeks to explain much of the novel's remaining mysteries. It is revealed that Tiller, the actual 'skimmer of the seas' has been trading with the Alderman for a good twenty years whilst it is also revealed that Seadrift is in fact the Dutch trader's long lost daughter Eudora. Finally, the novel ends with the predicted marriage of Alida and Ludlow as well as the more surprising union of Tiller and Eudora. Once it is established that Alida is going to marry Ludlow, Van Beverout desperately tries to marry Van Staats to his newly found daughter. Luckily Eudora listens to the yearnings of her own heart, and pairs off with the captain of *The Water Witch*, effectively sailing off into limitless ocean before dissolving into the horizon never to be seen again.

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<sup>27</sup> Whilst Cooper had the nautical details of *The Pilot* thoroughly checked by his cousin Ben Cooper, the same cannot be said for *The Water Witcher*, in which he relishes in the romantic unreality of the brigantine.

Before going into analysis of the characters of the novel it is necessary to define the theme of transgender more coherently. In a novel where Lord Cornbury so signally represents the evil of British rule and its degenerative effect upon the colonies, it seems strange that Cooper should create an oppositional cast of American sea heroes who themselves are subject to themes of cross gender sailing under the masts of the hermaphrodite brig. In the previous novels where Cooper's American heroes have been represented by clear cut naval officers, it strikes the reader as most irregular. Added to this, is Cornbury himself, who in Cooper's time would have been associated with cross dressing. A portrait of Cornbury hanging in the New York Historical Society reveals him to be wearing a low cut top and a blue dress allegedly 'to better represent her Majesty'.<sup>28</sup> Today, Patricia Bodomi has provided enough evidence to dispel the myths of the transvestite tendencies of Cornbury, determining that the disgraced governor was in fact the victim of republican ideology and spin. Despite this, Cooper unusually does not make any allusions to the contemporary historical representation of the disgraced governor of New York as a cross-dresser, despite his own republican persuasion. Van Beverout merely encounters Cornbury by chance early in the morning, where, as part of his imprisonment, he is allowed relief from his cell. Cooper writes Cornbury chiefly as a manipulative figure who uses flattery on the cautious Alderman before having the cheek to ask for a bailout loan of \$2,000. Essentially he serves as a further example of the villainy imposed by the throne upon the early American people, as the Alderman's concluding alliterative judgement of the ex-governor reveals:

Foiled in an effort that not nothing but his desperate condition, and nearly desperate character, could have induced him to attempt, the degenerate descendant of the virtuous Clarendon walked towards his place of confinement with the step of one who

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<sup>28</sup> Karin A. Wulf 'Redressing Lord Cornbury: Gender, Transatlantic Gossip, and Political Culture in British Colonial America' in *Reviews in American History* Vol.27 No.1 (1999) p.33

assumed a superiority over his fellows, and yet with a mind so indurated by habitual depravity, as to have left it scarcely the trace of a dignified or virtuous quality.<sup>29</sup>

In his original preface to *The Water Witch*, Cooper diplomatically defines his own historical representation of Cornbury as adhering only to historical fact, that the Lord was 'a prisoner of debt'. Later on, in Chapter XXVII when Seadrift has been captured by Ludlow, Tiller meets with Cornbury in order to bribe him into giving the captured smuggler a leaner sentence should she face trial. Cornbury, even in the face of aiding one of the novel's heroines, is proved to be hypocritical and corrupting of the system of laws, at one point he even goes as far as to condone the practice of freebooting in minor instances. A 'truckling miscreant', Cornbury is the representation of the evil of the English aristocracy, which is usually defined by Cooper in masculine terms (as we shall see with the *Coquette*), yet the very fact that Cornbury, historically, carries transvestite connotations is a subject of concern. Perhaps for Cooper, all he needed from Cornbury was a known representative of English greed and corruption, whilst the meandering sexual qualities of 'the hermaphrodite brig' and Master Seadrift are an effective opposition to such an imposing patriarch within the supranational realm of the ocean, which allows the fluidity of movement across conventional social boundaries.

For maritime writers across the centuries, there has always been the plot device that utilises a female character disguised as a sailor. It functions as an easy way of slipping a female character into an otherwise highly male environment, a way to combat the negative energies that could potentially deter the ordinary reader from a most seaworthy novel. In *The Red Rover*, we will remember Heidegger's mistress masquerading as the ship's cabin boy (known as Roderick) before being correctly identified by Mrs Wyllys. For Cooper, his female characters though often attacked as being 'uninteresting nonpersons,' usually stand as strict representations of Christian charity and pacifism, with the emphasis upon 'counting the cost in human rather than national or property

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<sup>29</sup> *The Water Witch* p.23

terms'.<sup>30</sup> We have seen this within *The Pilot* with Alice Dunscombe, and again in *The Red Rover* both when Gertrude faints at the sign of mutiny and when 'Roderick' pleads with Heidegger to not engage in battle with the *Dart*. In *The Water Witch* we have a similar revelation of gender with Master Seadrift, who turns out to be Eudora Van Beverout. Seadrift is not a portent of tradition feminine values, existing as a woman in the masculine disguise of a sailor, she becomes a heroine.

We are introduced to Seadrift at the end of Chapter X, when like 'some creature of supernatural attributes,' she interjects upon a tranquil scene within Van Beverout's villa The Lust in the Rust. Her purpose for entering the scene is to do business with the Alderman, to show the various highly cosmopolitan wares the *Water Witch* has collected. From the outset, Seadrift is visually described as not being one of Cooper's conventional seamen; in the presence of Alida, she appears to be 'shaded by a rich brown hue', a 'pair of dark, bushy and jet-black silken whiskers, that were in singular contrast to eyelashes and brows of feminine beauty and softness' merely hinting at her masquerade.<sup>31</sup> Once alone, her manner relaxes, and Cooper goes as far as to imply this blatant masquerade:

There was so little of that vulgar and common character which is usually seen in men of his pursuit, in the gentle aspect and subdued air of his fine features, that it might be fancied he was thus singularly endowed by nature, in order that deception might triumph.<sup>32</sup>

It would be a mistake to define Seadrift as one of Cooper's common sailors, since there is very little common about her, though she does share some of the familiar character traits outlined by

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<sup>30</sup> 'uninteresting nonpersons' refers to Joyce W. Warren's *The American Narcissus: Individualism and Women in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p246-47 whilst 'counting the cost in human...' is cited from Carolyn Heilbrun *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973 reprint New York: Norton, 1993) viii

<sup>31</sup> *The Water Witch* p.101

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid* p112

Philbrick.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis on Seadrift means that she (as a he) essentially functions as a commanding presence and is for the most part of the novel considered to be the actual captain of the *Water Witch*. In a way, she almost occupies an equal place with Tiller the brig's real commander since the ship is clearly an idyllic state of their own making. Most importantly, as David Callahan maintains, Seadrift's practice of masquerading as a man 'is scarcely performing masculinity at all, but rather constantly hinting at his womanliness despite his disguise as a man'.<sup>34</sup> This is demonstrated in Chapter XV, when Ludlow and Van Beverout hold a dialogue with the supposed captain of the *Water Witch* within the confines of her cabin. Before entering the cabin, the adventurers hear Seadrift singing in 'a fine, manly voice of great richness and depth' though 'the air was grave, and altogether unusual for the social character of one who dwelt upon the ocean'. Her singing is accompanied by a few masterful 'light touches on the strings of a guitar'. Above all music making translates predominantly as a feminine practice, Seadrift's skill surpassing that of 'nimble-fingered' Alida.<sup>35</sup> Upon entering Seadrift's cabin the party observe the fine decorum of the room's furnishings as well as the various implements which are seen to 'occupy the leisure of a cultivated but perhaps an effeminate rather than a vigorous mind'.<sup>36</sup> We will of course remember 'the frowning appendages of war' decorating Heidegger's cabin. In contrast, as Ludlow observes, Seadrift's quarters are 'entirely destitute of arms, not even a pistol or sword being suspended in those places where weapons of that description are usually seen in all vessels employed either in war or in a trade that might oblige those who sail them to deal in violence'.<sup>37</sup> As Callahan concludes if Seadrift's masquerade is performing anything 'it is rather a different way of being a man', the threat of *The*

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<sup>33</sup> 'argumentative dogmatism... carefree irresponsibility, and blind obedience to the commands of superiors' Philbrick also lists superstitious ignorance, which I feel does not register with Seadrift. In the case of *The Water Witch* Trysail clearly fulfils the Smollettian common sailor. *Development of American Sea Fiction* p.81

<sup>34</sup> David Callahan 'Cooper's Androgynous Heroes' in *Reading Cooper, Teaching Cooper* ed. by Jeffrey Walker (NY, AMS Press Inc, 2007) pp. 244-262 (p.254)

<sup>35</sup> *The Water Witch* p179 Seadrift's song is the ceremonial cue for the adventurers to enter the cabin. Similarly in *The Red Rover*, we will remember how Heidegger arranges the theatrical appearance of Neptune as Wilder and his women are first taken aboard the ship.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* p.180

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* p.181

*Water Witch* is not through violence, only its imposition to the stern British trading laws, which are proven to be fairly pointless.

The focus of Callahan's article seeks to update the critical assessment of Natty Bumppo who rather than being treated as Leslie Fiedler's woman-hating ancestor of Indiana Jones or Rambo, combines both masculine and feminine characteristics to harness an idealised state of existence: 'superbly able at a type of practical living in the world, but also exemplary of the ethical behaviour and coherence supposedly more easily attainable by women'.<sup>38</sup> In doing so, he points also to Eudora and one of Cooper's later sea novels *Jack Tier*, in which the novel's title character also turns out to be a woman in disguise. 'In both cases', as Callahan suggests, Cooper can both hint 'at male bonding aboard ship without offending the decorum of the time by chronicling homosexual relationships' as well as imply a preferred state of being in which a man or a woman, can like Bumppo, be benefited by possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics, and become the more balanced androgynous hero.<sup>39</sup> Once again, it is a new state of existence that overrides mainland social convention. In the face of barbarism, Cooper saw feminine characteristics as having an important place among civilised society.

For Callahan, an overbalance of masculinity in Cooper's characters often makes them thoroughly unsympathetic, posing as nothing more as aggressive bullies. In Byron's *The Corsair*, we see how Conrad's violent nature, his wrath against his enemies corrupts the personality of Gulnare his respected love interest.<sup>40</sup> We have already seen this with Gray and Heidegger, who hold a central role within their respected texts illuminating a darker vengeful edge to republican ideology. *The Water Witch* is no exception in including these masculine oppressors, but Cooper does do something to combat them. As Philbrick attests, the clearest distinction between masculine and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid p.248

<sup>39</sup> Ibid p.253

<sup>40</sup> After saving Conrad from incarceration, Gulnare effectively bests Conrad in masculine terms and changes from damsel in distress to fully fledged heroine albeit a murderous one, who kills the Corsair's personal enemy Pasha Seyd. The transition in character causes much drama, as her act of murder becomes a loss of innocence. 'The crime – 'tis not to punish those of Seyd-/That hated tyrant, Conrad – he must bleed!/I see thee shudder – but my soul is changed/Wronged – spurned – reviled – and it shall be avenged' Baron George Gordon Byron 'The Corsair' in *The Selected Words of Lord Byron* (Paris & Lyon, B.Corman and Blanc 1835) p.45

feminine forces within the nautical romance is through Ludlow's command of the *Coquette* (a ship whose very name implies mixed gender) and its opposition with the almost matriarchal society existing aboard *The Water Witch* under the rule of the Sea Green Lady. Ludlow is the pinnacle of manliness, his command of the *Coquette* and relationship with Trysail only seek to further his manliness ('for the worst enemy I have will not say I am very womanish').<sup>41</sup> As Philbrick says, 'the very metaphors that Cooper applies to the *Coquette* are masculine in their connotations'. As the ship prepares to battle the French in the novel's climax it appears like 'a boxer taking off his jacket, with the intention of making a fair stand-up fight for it'.<sup>42</sup> It is through this kind of errant masculinity that the *Coquette* is essentially registered as doomed.

Philbrick's own opinion of Ludlow is not so far from the idea of Cooper's lay figures ('all uniform and no brain'). Along with Griffith from *The Pilot*, they are both as seamen 'comparative failures' staggering 'under a burden of manly pride and an undue sense of propriety' failing to detach themselves completely 'from the forms and values of civilisation'.<sup>43</sup> This is perhaps too harsh a criticism of these middle heroes as I would suggest they relate more to Cooper as a guardian of domestic normality and less to do with the Melvillian image of the landless sailor which surrounds Cooper's common sailors. That said there is something wanting in Ludlow's character. Here is a man enlisted as an officer in the Royal navy, though descended from a family of 'king-haters' and according to Van Beverout hateful of English legislation he still remains loyal to his duties to the throne.<sup>44</sup> In a way, Ludlow could be seen, like Captain Heidegger as a man of 'thwarted ambition', a man who because of the time is unable to live as deliberately as he wants. In contrast to Tiller,

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<sup>41</sup> *The Water Witch* p.231

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid* p.

<sup>43</sup> Philbrick *The Development of American Sea Fiction* p. 81- Both Griffith and Ludlow stagger under a burden of manly pride and an undue sense of propriety. They are forever choking down their resentment and biting down the indignation; 'fellow,' says Ludlow to one he deems as inferior, 'this impudence almost surpasseth patience.' Griffith and Ludlow fail to achieve the dignity of true seamen because they never completely detach themselves from the forms and values of civilization. The reader is not surprised to learn that at the end of the Revolution Griffith 'entirely withdrew from the ocean and devoted the remainder of his life to the conjoint duties of a husband and a good citizen'.

<sup>44</sup> 'Here is the Patroon of Kinderhook, a man who loves English legislation as little as myself; - he will be less reluctant to see an honest shilling turned to gold.' *The Water Witch* p.110



Seadrift and Van Beverout, Ludlow can be perceived as a coward, but this relates more to the situation of the colonies itself.

Philbrick's idea of the *Coquette* is one that uses errant masculinity to form an imposing symbol of strength and suppression, as he goes on to say 'as a vessel of the King, [the *Coquette*] is the representative of authority and order; her function is to punish the enemies of the Crown'. However, Philbrick has made a minor error in his reading of the text, since the ship is not a vessel of any king, but instead a vessel belonging to her Majesty Queen Ann. We may question the importance of this error, but I feel the word 'king' only seems to emphasise the masculine themes of domination, so it is necessary to correct Philbrick on this detail. *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover* were both set during a time in which our predominantly male American heroes were defying a monarchy represented by a king, but in *The Water Witch* just as the hermaphrodite brig sails under the benevolent protective rule of its own water-queen, so does its English antagonist. In an utter condemnation of the throne that is of course steeped in dramatic irony, Seadrift attacks the monarch on the misogynistic grounds that she is nothing more than a woman, and therefore unworthy of wielding such sovereign power:

"Though seated on a throne, she is but a woman. Disguise nature as thou wilt, she is a universal tyrant and governs all alike. The head that wears a crown dreams of the conquests of the sex, rather than of the conquests of states; the hand that wields the sceptre is fitted to display its prettiness with the pencil of the needle; and though words and ideas may be taught and sounded forth with the pomp of royalty, the tone is still that of woman".<sup>45</sup>

Seadrift herself is no different to the Queen, a woman in a role usually permitted to a man, the only discrepancy is that she must disguise herself as a man to be taken seriously as both, sailor and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid p.128

freebooter. At the same time, as Callahan maintains, this 'withering assessment of women's characters and interests' displayed through an analysis of Queen Ann only goes to strengthen the degenerative reflection of the colonies she rules over. As Cooper professes 'the connection with the crown was direct', the general view of the Colonies is of a dominated population of suppressed and inferior people.<sup>46</sup> Ludlow, therefore, may be seen as an unhappy product of the times, less a figment of errant masculinity and more a character of emasculation. Seadrift, for example, literally runs rings around him, knowing exactly how to rile this repressed middle hero. In Chapter XI, when Ludlow and Seadrift meet for the first time, the latter boasts the superiority of the Water Witch over the former's 'lumbering sloop of Queen Anne'.

By the title of my royal mistress, young beardless, but there is an insolence in this language that might become him you wish to represent! My ship, heavy or light of foot as she may be, is fated to bring yonder false trader to judgement.

"By the craft and qualities of the Water-Witch! But this is language that might become one who was at liberty to act his pleasure," returned the stranger, tauntingly imitating the tone in which his angry companion had spoken. "You would have proof of my identity: listen. There is one who vaunts his power, that forgets he is a dupe of my agent; and that even while his words are so full of boldness, he is a captive!"<sup>47</sup>

Ludlow only becomes infuriated, reddening and biting his lip 'endeavouring to repress his anger'<sup>48</sup>. As Callahan simply puts it, Seadrift is a woman who is a better man than the narrative's representative of official masculinity'.<sup>49</sup> However, even Seadrift after being established as Eudora Van Beverout, is restored to a more feminine role through her union with Tom Tiller. As Grossman

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<sup>46</sup> The connexion with the crown was direct, and for a long period the majority of the inhabitants were considered as of a different race, and of course as of one less to be considered than that of their conquerors'. *The Water Witch* p113

<sup>47</sup> Ibid p.125

<sup>48</sup> Ibid p.164

<sup>49</sup> Callahan *Cooper's Androgynous Heroes* p.254

affirms it is a 'timid surrender to [the] solemn institution [of] female respectability'.<sup>50</sup> We can argue, that the couple's ending, their flight to sea, carries less of the domestic connotations especially in contrast to the more traditional union of Ludlow and Alida.

Whilst Seadrift receives much attention throughout the novel's first half, Tom Tiller, for the most part, remains behind the scenes. Introduced during the river voyage to the Lust in the Rust in Chapter III, Tiller draped in an Indian shawl is identified as being a highly charismatic 'son of the ocean'.<sup>51</sup> Effortlessly taking the helm of the boat 'with a coolness that did infinite credit to his powers for commanding' he fishes for information 'concerning the freebooters among the islands'. Typically as a mariner, Tiller is represented as a presence of elevated confidence and esteem above the mere land dwellers, whom can only look on in awe.

He seemed to analyse the half-maritime character of the crew and passengers at a glance, and to feel that sort of superiority over his companions which men of his profession were then a little too wont to entertain towards those whose ambition could be bounded by terra-firma.<sup>52</sup>

Averse to the social forms of aristocracy, Cooper is of course susceptible to the ideal of a natural form of aristocracy. It is an ideal that we have seen invested within Natty Bumppo as well as Cooper's more memorable sailors, their deliberate existence in parallel with the natural environment, holding mastery and a respect of their elements. It functions to inform Callahan's theorisation of androgyny in Cooper's heroes, as models of social improvement.

Tiller is more obviously masculine in character but his command of the *Water-Witch* brings out his androgynous connotations. Cooper frequently maintains how much of the manly cast view Tiller's ship with almost sexual preferences, as the fabled skimmer of the seas draws out of Ludlow.

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<sup>50</sup> James Grossman *James Fenimore Cooper: American Men of Letters* p.73

<sup>51</sup> *The Water Witch* p.38

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid* p39

“You are a seaman, Captain Ludlow, and have an eye for comeliness in a craft, as well as in a woman. Look at those harpings! There is no fall of a shoulder can equal that curve, in grace or richness; this shear surpasses the justness and delicacy of any waist; and then you see the transoms, swelling and rounded like the outlines of a Venus.”<sup>53</sup>

This fact is emphasised for Ludlow in how the sweet brig is essentially an object of chase. The ship will always elude him, however, and this is really down to the masterful command of Tiller and the confused divisions within Ludlow’s character. Philbrick writes favourably of Cooper’s creation of Tiller, building upon the character of Tom Coffin that so dominated *The Pilot*, Tiller is a fulfilled version of ‘the ideal seaman’ representing the epitome of seamanship as well as a healthy sense of morality. As a result of not being written out of the novel on grounds of his social background like Coffin, Tiller eventually becomes a fully realised hero who as, Philbrick says, ‘attains the stature of a deity’. During the fire that breaks out aboard the *Coquette* in Chapter XXXII, Tiller temporarily allied with the English takes command over operations in order to save lives.

Seen by the light, with his peculiar attire, his firm and certain step, and his resolute air, the free-trader resembled some fancied sea-god, who, secure in his immortal immunities, had come to act his part in that awful but exciting trial of hardihood and skill.<sup>54</sup>

In the grace of some kind of benevolent deity and in recognition of Ludlow’s relentless efforts, Tiller informs the captain of the *Coquette* that the *Water-Witch* will forever stay away from American shores.<sup>55</sup> In reality, Tiller realises that Ludlow is at least a worthy opponent who will always chase the brig so long as it remains in breach of the laws of the land. Since the chase is likely to lead to

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid p.165

<sup>54</sup> *The Water Witch* p.428-429

<sup>55</sup> ‘I have long thought this is the last time the keel of the Water-Witch will eve plough the American seas’ *The Water Witch* p.422

violence, Tiller graciously steps backwards for love of his ship and crew. As is often the case in Cooper's fiction, the inflation of violence is diluted before escalating to scenes of bloodshed. *The Water Witch* at least does not back down anticlimactically, as John Peck criticises *The Red Rover* for doing. As a benign presence throughout the novel, it is the duty of Tiller as a godlike entity to prevent the possibility of violent confrontation from ever occurring.

We may question where this benevolent aspect comes from. Both *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover* were defined by sense of masculine opposition between America and Great Britain. Thematically, war was pervading both novels, but with *The Water Witch* there is less of a sense, since the focus is upon the chase of Tiller's elusive craft. Britain is at war with the French, which of course leads to the final battle and the alliance between the English forces and their antagonists represented by the rebellious smugglers. This benevolence is represented by the novel's enduring symbol of the sea green lady, the spiritual protector of the *Water Witch*, as sculpted above the ship's cutwater.<sup>56</sup>

A female form, fashioned with the carver's best skill, stood on the projection of the cutwater. The figure rested lightly on the ball of one foot, while the other was suspended in an easy attitude, resembling the airy posture of the famous Mercury of the Bolognese. The drapery was fluttering, scanty, and of a light sea-green tint, as if it had imbibed a hue from the element beneath. The face was of that dark bronzed color which human ingenuity has, from time immemorial, adopted as the best medium to portray a superhuman expression. The locks were dishevelled, wild, and rich; the eye full of such a meaning as might be fancied to glitter in the organs of a sorceress while a smile so strangely meaning and malign played about the mouth, that the young sailor started when it first met his view, as if a living thing had returned his look.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid p.172

<sup>57</sup> Ibid p.169 – 'the famous Mercury of the Bolognese' is an example of Cooper's admiration of Italian art. The Bolognese School of painting was founded in the Sixteenth Century and rivalled both Florence as Rome as the world's centre of painting.

Cooper has created an interestingly ambiguous symbol with the Sea Green Lady. Simply deconstructing the symbol of the Sea Green Lady illuminates elements we would normally associate with the United States. To begin with, she represents a feminine personification of liberty, holding above her head 'an open book, with letters of red written on its pages' and we can of course draw parallels to that other idol of European artistry, which is yet to be built upon Liberty Island. Secondly, as is the case with the Alderman, the open book can complete the illusion of 'witchcraft and necromancy' fulfilling the infamous name of the brigantine.<sup>58</sup> Thirdly, she can be regarded as a kind of Mammon, a goddess of materialism. Upon reading the inscriptions on the open book, we learn that it is a quotation from *The Merchant of Venice* ("Albeit I never lend nor borrow/By taking, nor by giving of excess/ Yet to supply the ripe wants of my friend/I'll break a custom") which seems to advocate the ship's illegal purpose as well as an endorsement of consumerism.<sup>59</sup>

The bewitching element of material artefacts can be read frequently throughout *The Water Witch*. When introduced to the Alderman in Chapter I, he proclaims himself to be a seller of 'thrift', before going on to inform his accompanying slaves as being 'your true philosopher's stone'.<sup>60</sup> In Chapter X, Seadrift presents Alida with an extensive horde of high end materials from all around the world: 'ornaments of the elephant's tooth, cut by a cunning artificer in the far Eastern lands' and 'satin of Tuscany'.<sup>61</sup> When Ludlow confronts the smuggler, Seadrift remarks how she should like 'to tempt the royal Anne in her closet, with such a display of goodly laces and heavy brocades'.<sup>62</sup> In a fulfilment of this desire, when Tiller visits Cornbury, the crooked politician advocates the practice of smuggling if only to provide for an elite minority:

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid p.169

<sup>59</sup> *The Water Witch* p.170

<sup>60</sup> Ibid p.11

<sup>61</sup> Ibid p.118

<sup>62</sup> Ibid p.128

Men in high places must respect the laws, yet it is not always convenient, or even useful, that they should deny themselves every indulgence which policy would prohibit to the masses.<sup>63</sup>

In between the political transatlantic differences, it seems that there is an establishment of common ground represented by the desire for materialistic fulfilment.

In further regards to necromancy, the symbol of the witch obviously conveys gothic connotations. What the gothic meant to Cooper is something Phinit-Akson has defined as being less to do with the 'Protestant, nightmare visions of the late eighteenth century Gothic novelists' and more relatable to Catholicism: 'the fabulous era of medieval piety when artisans and artists were stimulated by their faith to produce masterpieces of art and architecture for the purpose of magnifying the greatness of their God'.<sup>64</sup> Once again Cooper's observation of the Catholic Church and artistry is a result of his experiences in Italy. Anti-Catholicism, as Henry P. Roberson defines it is 'the oldest prejudice in America', yet when Cooper travelled to Italy, 'he was an outsider looking in' and what he saw to his own surprise (he was of course suspicious of the autocratic tendencies of papist belief) was 'prayer, sacredness, and a true Christianity in Catholicism'.<sup>65</sup>

Of course the main problem with the sea green lady is that she cannot be readily representative of a one Christian God, if anything, she is more attributable to a pagan form of worship but she does at least, as I believe Cooper intends, to evoke a spirit of benevolence and Christian charity, as witnessed when she selflessly comes to the aid of the *Coquette*. The war mongering spirit of Gray and Heidegger could be seen as a far more puritanical basis of opposition. When they speak of the evils of the English aristocracy they ultimately believe that those in power exist to suppress and dominate those underneath them. It demonstrates a fundamental difference between Protestantism and Catholicism, as Roberson maintains: whilst 'Luther and Calvin believed

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<sup>63</sup> *The Water Witch* p.351

<sup>64</sup> Helen Phinit-Akson *Ritual and Aesthetic: The Influence of Europe on the Art of James Fenimore Cooper* p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Henry P. Roberson 'James Fenimore Cooper and Catholicism' as published in *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art* ed. by Hugh C. MacDougall No.14 (2005) p.65-68

human nature to be wholly corrupted, having no good in it', Catholicism 'characterises human nature as wounded, creating a tendency to sin but still possessing the grace of God's creation'.<sup>66</sup> As I believe, Tiller is in alignment with the latter, further marking him different from Gray and Heidegger who are caught up with thwarting the grand injustice of the British Empire. Tiller as a character more in possession of the supranational advantage of the ocean in this way represents resolution. Put simply he is so entwined with the ocean that political differences mean less to him than the affirmation of humanitarian principles and the respect for another man's life. As Philbrick notes, the crew of the *Water Witch* 'exist in a community of love and loyalty' which is presided over by Tiller who eventually is seen to become the real protective force behind the *Sea Green Lady*.

The lasting impression of *The Water Witch* is a bloated sense of benevolence which is best summed up by the final flight of Tiller and Eudora into infinite ocean, a realm of possible adventure and boundless freedom. As Philbrick summarises, 'Eudora is offered the love of a father, the security of a wealthy marriage, and the companionship of a genteel friend,' in short 'all values of civilization,' but she rejects all these things in favour of 'a grandly romantic gesture for a life at sea with her lover, a life "with a ship for a dwelling-the tempestuous ocean for a world!"'<sup>67</sup> It is much less attached to any of the deeper political questions surrounding the national narrative posed by both *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover* and more an embrace of the romantic figments that the supranational ocean can provide. Of course, *The Water Witch* is essentially lacking a coherent historical narrative, whilst the Dutch traders and smugglers are wanting to establish some form of national identity born out of the burden of heavy trade taxation as imposed by the British there is no concrete conclusion due to the novel's exclusion from the significant Revolutionary tension that characterises the late eighteenth century. Instead, the novel is more a fulfilment of the sea romance. It is at once a rejection in part of conventional civilisation and an advocacy of an idealised life upon a supranational setting.

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<sup>66</sup> Henry P. Roberson 'James Fenimore Cooper and Catholicism' p.68

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Philbrick *The Development of American Sea Fiction* p.72



In conclusion, *The Water Witch* is a decidedly different novel to both *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover*. Highly romantic in tone, it surpasses the limits of the historical romance. Less concerned with the War of Independence, yet still instilled with revolutionary sentiment, the novel essentially exists in a different place, protected by history. As a result of the novel's situation as well as Cooper's Italian inspiration through landscape and Catholicism, *The Water Witch* is a much more benign novel than the author's previous sea tales. Through the androgynous characters of Tom Tiller and Master Seadrift, Cooper presents us with a set of familiar characters who offer an alternative, if all the more romantic, vision of living in harmony with the world. As middle hero, Ludlow is both American and English and represents an awkward dualism between his own personal loyalties and his allegiance with the crown.

Ultimately, the novel though fashioned as a historical romance is more radical than previous criticism has acknowledged. I have argued throughout this thesis, that Cooper's sea novels were trying to heal the tension generated by the revolutionary conflict that lived on through Antebellum society. Cooper utilised the historical romance as a way of framing the glories of American maritime endeavour and unifying the national experience in such a way as to illustrate how the United States and its people may conduct itself. In contrast to *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover*, I should like to maintain that *The Water Witch* is an investment in the supranational setting, where humanity is revealed to be ultimately infused with a certain goodness that we may attach to Rousseau. I feel it marks a more profound change and development in Cooper's sea fiction, with the novel's ending acting as a fulfilment of a kind of domestic harmony as well as a rejection of conventional civilisation in favour for a universe of near limitless possibilities.

## Conclusion

“Come, my friends,  
‘T is not too late to seek a newer world.  
Push off, and sitting well in order smite  
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
Of all the Western stars, until I die.

Alfred Lord Tennyson *Ulysses* 1842<sup>1</sup>

When Walter Scott criticised *The Red Rover* on grounds that the author spent too much time describing the rigging of the ship, he probably missed the greater achievement of James Fenimore Cooper.<sup>2</sup> Cooper’s keen eye for correct nautical conduct and detail is what defined his sea fiction above other writers. Here was the American ship, an emblem of Atlantic modernity, specifically and painstakingly designed to combat the elements in such a way as to protect the lives of its crew so that they may successfully reach their destination. Partnered with the romantic conceptions of the ship and the sailor, Cooper’s realistic ship is symptomatic of a tremendous nationalist pride that represented what the American people could achieve if it was united in the spirit of its founding ideology.

This thesis has been based on the critical outlook, as maintained by Thomas Philbrick, that Cooper’s first three sea novels, *The Pilot*, *The Red Rover* and *The Water Witch* form a loose trilogy of revolutionary nautical romances communicating the story of rebellion and revolution against British autocracy through American maritime activity. With this in mind it is necessary to define each

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<sup>1</sup>Whereas it is prophesied in Homer’s *The Odyssey* that Odysseus will die in comfort in old age, Tennyson’s poem sees the ageing king take off into the sunset one last time thereby railing against his destiny. Alfred Lord Tennyson ‘Ulysses’ in *The Poetical Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson* edited by (Boston; Ticknor and Fields 1862) p.184 lines 56-61

<sup>2</sup> A journal entry from Sir Walter Scott dated 14<sup>th</sup> Jan 1828 reads:” I read Cooper’s new novel work, *The Red Rover*; the current of which rolls entirely upon the ocean. Sometimes, there is too much of nautical language; in fact it overpowers everything else... The graceful form of the spars and the tracery of the ropes and cordage against the sky is too often dwelt upon. *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* ed. by W. E. K. Anderson (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972) p.415

novel as part of the overriding story of detachment from British sovereignty by defining the conflicting figments of the historical romance and the supranational romance of the sea, as illustrated through the last three chapters of my thesis.

*The Pilot* serves as an introduction to the concept of the sea novel, as well as the trilogy's dominant theme of national separation and independence defined by the American Revolution. Less of a tale of the sea in that it is inadvertently confined to a coastal margin, *The Pilot* is predominantly a tale of adventure and revolutionary espionage. Through the character of Tom Coffin, Cooper introduces the supranational life of the sailor and establishes a sense of the sailor's elevated existence that overrides the social conventions of landed society. The social hierarchy of the ship is presided over by a lengthy cast of genteel American naval officers, but at sea, the simple coxswain manages to rise to such a prominent level of heroic stature that he begins to exceed the novel's mysterious title character Gray as well as the genre's stock middle heroes. This of course is problematic to the structure of Cooper's tale as Jason Berger maintains and it is for this reason that the coxswain is sacrificed in order for the revolutionary narrative to take place.

The fact that Coffin is so at home at sea, means that he is in essence almost alien to the revolutionary cause. The pilot on the other hand, through his bitter resentment of Britain and his vocal admiration of the idealistic notions of American Independence is preferred by Berger as the main hero of the novel. I argued against this, believing that the shadowy pilot was too much of a wrathful character for the tastes of Cooper's own preferences. Historically remembered as a seaman of unsurpassed, Captain John Paul Jones is such a character that cannot escape the illusion of revolutionary wrath. Mr Gray represents the real threat of revolutionary social upheaval; a violent and vengeful backlash against Great Britain, where the tyrannical tendencies of the suppressor are inadvertently transferred to the oppressed. As a result, I agree with Donald Darnell's belief that the real hero of *The Pilot*, in Cooper's mind, is either Griffith or Barnstable. Cooper's middle heroes are able to serve in the fight for American Independence but are not twisted through

their own fantasies of power. Instead they can readily be applied to the new order as respectable Americans, whilst the pilot is left forever to navigate a cruel ocean of an impotent class based rage.

As the second act of the trilogy, *The Red Rover* takes the revolutionary drama of *The Pilot* but isolates it within a historical setting prior to the War of Independence. In contrast to *The Pilot*, the immediacy of the Revolutionary War is replaced by a setting of complacency in British Colonial America. Heidegger as the Red Rover is a threat to the laws of the colonial nation, but he is soon illuminated to be a pioneer, an oracle prophesising the inevitability of the formation of the republic nation. As a character arc, Heidegger essentially provides the novel with a well structured national narrative. Before Heidegger can fight a just war, he must rid himself of the amoral ways of the pirate identity of the Red Rover. Only then can he die honourably in the official cause of American Independence.

The supranational element of the ocean is more grounded within Cooper's second novel where it threatened to harm the revolutionary narrative of *The Pilot*. The shipboard environment allows Cooper to include the multi-racial pairing of Dick Fid and Scipio Africanus, the latter a prominent African American character in a time when the abolition movement was beginning to gain notoriety. I took pains to stress whilst Cooper may not be attempting to forge a defining message of racial equality, the supranational ship does give Scipio a degree of freedom that he probably would not have been granted upon the land.

The middle hero of Wilder may be the only thing holding this novel back from being a true American masterpiece. In my understanding, he represents once again, a stock character of the romantic tradition who is even more indebted to the conventions of an English literary culture by his very attainment by the novel's ending, of a noble birthright. For a novelist who claims to advance republican spirit, Cooper is still very much connected to English literature, even in writing the most 'maritime book' in all of literature.

As the conclusive final act of the trilogy, *The Water Witch* further isolates revolutionary sentiment from the War of Independence but still manages to contain a vague sense of historical

cohesion through the yearning for political independence through the plight of a conquered people, the Dutch fur traders of New York. Critically we can argue that the motivations of the traders and smugglers are based on monetary gain, rather than any illusions of liberty, since the brigantine of the novel's title is dedicated to the circulation of illegal goods.

The novel's tone owes more towards the supranational element that has lingered throughout Cooper's first two sea novels. With Tom Tiller, Cooper creates a seaman of comparable heroic status to Tom Coffin. Drawing from all three of the heroic archetypes established within the trilogy, Tiller effectively becomes akin to a kind of deity. Effectively, Coffin and Tiller serve to bookend the analysis of the trilogy through their distinct expression of the supranational sailor.

The effect of Cooper's realisation of the sea also includes a travelling definition of gender. The forces of revolutionary sentiment, or the prototype Americans as we may call them, although involved in illegal activity as antagonists to British law, the crew of the *Water Witch* carry no bitterness or resentful feeling towards their oppressors, at least not to the extent of Gray or Heidegger. Instead they masterfully evade their pursuers at every turn, the very femininity of their ship defined by the *Sea Green Lady*, is their strength, whilst, in contrast, the turgid masculinity of the English as represented by Ludlow's command is their respected downfall. Of course, there is no real loser in this romance, because of Cooper's historical context, the novel exists in such a way that American Independence cannot yet be fulfilled, but the ocean provides its heroes with a safe haven from the woes of mainland life in British Colonial America and so the novel ends with the dissolution of the hermaphrodite brig into the horizon a fulfilment of the supranational poetics of the sea tale.

In the end, Cooper never claimed to be the sovereign over anything but his own novels. The sea novel as he saw it was an appropriate vessel in order to establish a national identity whilst also establishing an American genre indebted to the nation's prominent maritime endeavour. The sea, much like the wilderness of his frontier fiction, was an arena for man to test himself. Ultimately however, the sea was much more than this for Cooper, it was something he knew and understood as a sailor; a changeable character in its own right as well as supranational realm, where fantasies can

be played out and tested before they are implemented on the mainland. At the same time, for all Cooper's republican motivations, this thesis has endeavoured to illustrate how the author's writing conveyed a sense of resolving the problematic tension invested within the divided mindset of Antebellum society. Whether it has been through Franklin's themes of dispossession, the tyrannical tendencies of Cooper's more ardent supporters of liberty, or the notion that the essence of British society and identity is forever entwined into America's own national identity, Cooper uses the sea as a means of bringing these discrepancies to light, and this is not something he has usually been celebrated for.

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