2006

Reinscribing the Revolution: Genre and the Problem of National History in Early American Historical Novels

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REINSCRIBING THE REVOLUTION: 
GENRE AND 
THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL HISTORY IN EARLY AMERICAN 
HISTORICAL NOVELS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the 
Louisiana State University and 
Agricultural and Mechanical College 
In partial fulfillment of the 
Requirements for the degree of 
Doctor of Philosophy 

in 

The Department of English

by 
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B.A. University of New Orleans, 1990 
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August 2006
Dedication

To Michelle, Ian, Maddie, and Tim, all for you—always.
Acknowledgments

Undoubtedly, dissertation writing is a lonely process, but such feelings should never be confused with the reality that one simply cannot complete so complex and arduous a project without the support of many people. I believe that my work is the direct result of the great fortune of having such patient and generous people in my life. If this dissertation has any merit, it is due primarily to them.

Deepest thanks go to my director, Jerry Kennedy, for steadily encouraging me to work harder and making me better every day for it. I am only now beginning to fully recognize how wise your guidance has been. I also especially want to thank Ed White, whose enthusiastic support helped me to believe in the value of this project and whose vision made such a difference in my intellectual growth. In addition, I wish to thank Bainard Cowan, Bill Boelhower, and Sue Marchand, who all granted their generous support to this research and offered insightful comments that made the dissertation better. Thanks also to Rick Moreland who as my faculty mentor introduced me to both Jerry and Ed and guided me towards this project from the beginning. Finally, I want to formally recognize and express my sincerest gratitude to my wife, Michelle, my parents, Tim and Mary Ann, and my family, Ian, Maddie, and Tim. Your daily sacrifices enabled me to pursue this dream, and I will never forget that.
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Abstract

This dissertation examines nine early historical novels of the Revolution that recover an important yet largely forgotten archive of American cultural history. In the years following the War of 1812 writers from the Revolution’s successor generation reinscribed the history of national origins through narratives of the Revolution that address issues left unresolved by the Revolutionary War and subsequent Constitutional debates; thus, the Revolution itself becomes an important and ubiquitous subject area for writers attempting to situate narratives of national history. These national allegories, consciously constructed as patriotic narratives, unconsciously “bring forth” figurations that represent the official nation’s Others, people excluded by race, class, and gender. Thus, the dissertation addresses these novels both in their dimension as official patriotic narratives of national history and also as narratives that introduce liminal figures that undermine naïve versions of a unified nation. Ultimately, early Revolutionary historical novels express complex and conflicted versions of an American nation as it was constructed in the years leading up to the jubilee celebrations of 1825-26.

Among the texts explored here are Samuel Woodworth’s *The Champions of Freedom* (1816); James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Spy* (1821), *The Pilot* (1824), and *Lionel Lincoln* (1825); John Neal’s *Seventy-Six* (1823), Lydia Maria Child’s *The Rebels* (1825); Eliza Cushing’s *Saratoga* (1824) and *Yorktown* (1826); and Giles Gazer’s (pseud.) *Frederic de Algeroy* (1825).
Introduction

This project began with some rather simplistic questions about genre and resistance in early American historical novels. Almost from the first moment American historical novels were published, critics assumed that these works were crudely imitative of the form that Sir Walter Scott established (*Waverley*, 1814), and that the most famous American writer of historical novels, James Fenimore Cooper, was “the American Scott.”¹ Cooper disagreed, and the earliest expressions of the form, from Cooper and others, suggested a much more complicated generic inheritance. The familiar colonial logic that Americans lacked original artistic genius, that their literary productions were derivative and provincial, reinforced what I see as misreadings of some of the first expressions of an American national identity.

But what I did not see was just how complex and unstable the process of negotiating an American identity was for these writers. Furthermore, the notion of process demands that assumptions about historical periodization be re-thought. How do historical novels that hearken back to the Revolutionary break with the colonial past figure as part of the Early National period? When exactly does the early republic become the early nation, and how does a literary form, the historical novel, that specifically considers the relation between present and past, respond to the problem of an unresolved colonial heritage in America? These questions force us to reconsider assumptions about historical progress and literary histories that support it. In this sense my project follows some of the questions that William Spengemann asks in *A Mirror for Americanists*. Spengemann primarily argues for a much broader interpretation of colonial “American literature,” one that includes all of the New World, rather than just the original thirteen

¹ See George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance* and *James Fenimore Cooper: the American Scott*. 
colonies. Such a broadened perspective provides “several literary genealogies to set against the [New England Puritan] one that now occupies our exclusive attention” (22). This dissertation follows the logical consequences of such an expanded definition of American colonialism by suggesting that a broadened perspective on the colonial identity produces a more complicated understanding of how an American nation was constructed. Early historical novels, especially ones that deal with the American Revolution, explore the very “literary genealogies” that Spengemann addresses. These early novels show that the historical boundary between colonies and nation was never clear, despite the events of the Revolution. As Michael Warner notes, “the Revolution is a poor period marker of decolonization” (62), and thus, novels that look back upon that “period marker” and attempt to re-present an event that symbolized a colonial break inevitably struggle with issues that remained unresolved in the present.

I will argue that historical novels, as a form of historiography, respond to the problems of national history by offering discursive alternatives to dominant, monologic versions of American history. In this respect, early American historical novels participate in a process of decolonization that postcolonial theorists address.\(^2\) Like American identity itself, these works neither directly descend from Old World imperialistic historical models built upon a dialectic of metropolitan center and colonial margins, nor do they leap, fully formed, out of a literary wilderness that descends from a Puritan myth of American essentialism and exclusion of the “other.” Rather, early historical novels, most especially ones that focus on the Revolution, negotiate the space of a third term through which American identity can emerge. The “third term,” for lack of a better

\(^2\) See Lawrence Buell, “American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon” for one of the earliest examples of this connection. See also Michael Warner, Edward Watts, Malini Johar Schueller, Robert Blair St. George.
phrase, signifies what Marjorie Garber refers to as a “crisis category.” The third, which is completely heterogeneous and varies from one novel to the next (much as the Third World as a category implies an enormous range of differing local circumstances and histories\(^3\)), resists dialectical sublation. Binarisms ultimately break down in these narratives—history/fiction, Old World/New World, colonizer/colonized, self/other.

Instead, the third signifies a crucial generic space that, strictly speaking, is neither history nor fiction, and manifests itself in myriad forms within early historical novels. Liminal characters (ghosts, spies, immigrants, transvestites), geographic spaces (coastlines, forest borders, seaports, etc.), and interpolated popular genres (crime pamphlets, captivity narratives, gothic mysteries, etc.) complicate and destabilize assumptions that early American historical novels narrate progress and consolidate national identity. In their resolutions these narratives almost all concede to the discursive authority of nationalism, an authority that derives from the Eurocentric rhetoric of empire—what will later support the logic of Manifest Destiny—but within the narratives what dominates is an uncertainty about historical progress and ultimately about democracy itself.

The dissertation examines nine Revolutionary historical novels written between 1816 and the jubilee celebrations of 1826, each of which differently engages the formal problem of representing American history and national identity. Part of the project certainly involves recovering an antebellum archive, a rich cultural resource deserving of further exploration. But I hope to show that these are more than simple “literary readings” of somewhat obscure texts; rather, these works complicate our understanding of the troubled transition from Jeffersonian to Jacksonian democracy. Literary texts, as John Carlos Rowe points out, involve “discursive forces that contribute to larger social,

\(^3\) See Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, (11-12).
political, economic, and psychological narratives” (16), but I would also add that generic form plays an important part in these contributions as well. As Bakhtin notes, “form and content in discourse are one” (259). That is, I will argue that the very formal problems that led literary critics to dismiss early historical novels as aesthetically flawed and marginal works are better understood as expressions of larger cultural and social problems in America, especially ones left unresolved by the Revolution. The relation between past and present in historiography, “like a buoy floating on the sea, follow[s] the more vast movements of societies” (de Certeau 37), and thus by focusing on a number of historical novels that address the same event I will demonstrate the ways that historical novelists participated in a larger cultural project of reinscribing and displacing the violent Revolutionary legacy.

Chapter 1 explores The Champions of Freedom (1816) by Samuel Woodworth, one of the first examples of an American historical novel. In its highly experimental form the novel captures post-war exuberance and an inchoate sense of national identity. Yet its Native American characters also signify profound ambivalence about the origins of American history and culture. Native Americans represent a silent alterity in the narrative, a physical presence that exists outside an emerging patriotic national spirit and its opposition, the threat of self-serving American individualism.

Chapter 2 moves ahead to the 1820s and the popular advent of the historical novel by examining Cooper’s The Spy (1821) and John Neal’s Seventy-Six (1823). Both works come after the great financial panic of 1819 and are written during ongoing Congressional debates over pensions for Revolutionary soldiers. The novels specifically address the issue of personal memory as it relates to official historical accounts of the
Revolution. Their heroes are common Americans, “citizen soldiers,” who contribute to the early republican myth of heroic American yeomanry, but also complicate assumptions about the Revolution as a purely ideological political conflict.

Chapter 3 addresses questions of historical representation and the location of American identity by focusing on Cooper’s *The Pilot* (1824), one of the first nautical Revolutionary tales, and Eliza Cushing’s *Saratoga* (1824). Both novels associate American identity with geographic spaces, and the problems that arise when those spaces are subjected to imperial conquest and domination. Discursive conflicts in both narratives symbolically give agency to the sea and the land, respectively, and also open the issue of American identity in a broader Atlantic context.

Chapter 4 examines the problem of American Revolutionary origins through Cooper’s *Lionel Lincoln* (1825) and Lydia Maria Child’s *The Rebels* (1825). Both are set in Boston and utilize the city’s complex colonial history as a figure for examining the genealogical entanglements of American identity. As the national jubilee celebrations begin, the nature of America’s break with England becomes increasingly scrutinized and problematic. Both texts ultimately associate Revolutionary violence with democratic mobs in Boston, initiating a formal turn away from the traditional myth of a republic of yeomen.

Chapter 5 concludes by examining two novels, both dedicated to the strangely ambivalent figure of Lafayette whose famous tour of the U.S. in 1824-1825 initiated the jubilee celebrations. *The Hero of Camden Plains* (1825) and *Yorktown* (1826) entirely dispense with the American democratic myth that earlier historical novels strongly advocated; instead these works signify a return to representations of colonial aristocracy.
that marginalize the Revolution as an historic break with the past. They “other” and exclude Revolutionary violence as a means of establishing continuity with the social hierarchies of the past and absorb colonial discursive authority as part of a new national identity.
Introduction

_The Champions of Freedom_ (1816) is a national allegory, one of the first examples of a conscious attempt to unite official historical discourse with the popular novel. As a form the text embodies the inherent conflicts of America’s transition from colony to nation. But the paradox of fusing official genres that articulate a nationalist discourse built upon exclusion and domination of Others with popular democratic discursive forms or genres creates what Woodworth himself terms “a literary monster.” This chapter examines how _The Champions of Freedom_, in its multiplicity of generic forms and its ambivalent narrative structure, incarnates the latent cultural conflicts and inherent instabilities upon which an American identity is founded. First, by examining the ways that Woodworth interweaves various generic forms, even in the preface, I hope to illustrate the complex cultural functions that these forms embody. Woodworth negotiates among forms in a process that parallels America’s own cultural negotiation as it attempts to extricate itself from a colonial and Revolutionary legacy of violence and establish a national history free of that violent heritage.

After the War of 1812, Federalist opposition to Jeffersonian democrats was all but dead, and this, coupled with the American victory, created an unprecedented unity in the US further reinforced by incipient nationalism. _The Champions of Freedom_ certainly participates in the project of American nationalism, but Woodworth’s national narrative is complicated by local characters and histories that challenge the authority of his version.
of national history. Thus, the second part of the chapter will examine the “naïve”
national narrative that Woodworth constructs, while the third will discuss the specific
intersections where that narrative is ruptured by alternate American histories.
Woodworth contains his national narrative under the rubric of public and private
histories, and then controls them by weaving the two together as parallel narratives; that
is, the national history of the War of 1812 runs together with the private history of
George Washington Willoughby who comes of age during the war years. George, like
the nation, must choose between a virtuous or vicious path for himself; therefore
narrative oppositions are simplified and hence “naïve.” Native American characters
specifically challenge and complicate the naïve narrative of a nation divided between
virtuous self and vicious other. Though Woodworth seeks to repress those challenges to
the authority of the national narrative, they inevitably return and destabilize simple
oppositions.

A Monstrous Form

When Woodworth refers to his 1816 historical novel The Champions of Freedom
as a “literary monster,” it is no misnomer. As understood then, a “monster” was “a
malformed animal or plant; a fetus, neonate, or individual with gross congenital
malformation, usually of a degree incompatible with life,” (OED). In its generic form
The Champions of Freedom is just such a “fetus” or “neonate”: Woodworth’s newborn
national myth is ambitious, experimental, exuberant, and perhaps most of all, resistant to
typical genre categorizations. Though contained within the two-volume novel form, the
work sprawls over sixty-seven chapters and five hundred and sixty-six pages. At its core,
The Champions of Freedom professes to be the “most correct and complete History of the
recent War [of 1812]” combined with a fictitious romance, but such a description belies its novelty (1: xiv). Within the larger narrative frame of a bildungsroman, the work includes gothic ghosts, Indian and pirate captivity narratives, travel narratives, seduction plots, dramatic dialogues, songs, poems, even staged allegories. As a history the work interpolates naval biographies taken from the *Analectic* magazine, battle accounts taken from the *Port Folio*, official government documents such as Madison’s Declaration of War in 1812, a journal that chronologically summarizes all of the war’s events not included in the narrative itself, epistles from various characters describing battles, and philosophical discussions on war and religion.

The preface itself is a generic monster, but an illustrative one. Framed as a dialogue between the author and a “classical friend,” Woodworth establishes oppositions that manifest themselves throughout the work. After reading the manuscript the friend completely objects to Woodworth’s experiment:

“It is all a fault . . . from beginning to end. The grand fundamental rule of composition is violated in every chapter. It is a literary monster . . . . the plot is unnatural, the incidents absurd, and the language inelegant. But the greatest monster of all is your Mysterious Chief.” (1: xi)

The author then proceeds to defend his work by performing the very operations to which the friend objects: he interpolates an official “ADVERTISEMENT,” then a fantastic short story that functions as a parable for critics, and finally, after his friend walks out in disgust, he includes “A WORD TO THE READER,” a direct address apology for having “dared a bold flight in a new and untried region” (1: xvi). What I am suggesting is that the friend’s stylistic objections ultimately reveal the formal or generic significance of this largely forgotten antebellum text. *The Champions of Freedom* has been forgotten because of its flagrant genre-mixing and experimentation; its monstrous form directly
expresses the diversity of the emerging nation, but the project of nationalism ultimately suppresses such diversity in favor of a monologic culture built upon exclusions. Multiple genres in the preface incarnate the friend’s stylistic objections. While Woodworth argues for something new and never attempted before, the friend stresses classical rules for composition. But the friend’s rules are not so much “classical” as they are neo-classical. They derive from eighteenth-century rules against genre-mixing; thus, the friend states: “the mixture of truth and fiction is the very thing that constitutes a literary monster” (1: xii). It is also the very mixture that constitutes the historical novel, but Woodworth’s experiment bears little resemblance to the Old World historical novels that Sir Walter Scott began publishing in 1814 with Waverley. Rather, both in its use of popular American forms and its clearly patriotic national narrative The Champions of Freedom attempts to disentangle a national literary identity from an inherited colonial one, and Woodworth directly advertises this: “The grand object intended by the work here announced to the public, is a monument of American patriotism and bravery, embellished with a picture of those humbler virtues, which, though not so dazzling to the imagination, are not the less honorable to human nature and our national character” (1: xii-xiii).

The preface dialog also exposes the transitional status of authors in America. In repeated references to his readers, Woodworth responds to market pressures from a

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4 I’m following Jerome McGann’s argument here (though not quite to its textual extreme) by focusing on the various interpolated forms in Woodworth’s novel as “incarnations of meaning”: “We need to execute in regular ways our theoretical views about the material and performative character of textual works of imagination. Theory will not take us very far, as the history of scholarship for the past fifty and more years has proved. Barthes’s work set forth all the required theoretical lines, and others since have refined and reiterated them. Despite these things, and despite much lip service to materialist and phenomenological ideas, interpretive method today remains largely committed, at the practical level, to referential and vehicular, rather than to incarnational and performative, models of meaning” (536).
changing reading public, pressures that encourage the very kinds of genre-mixing that the friend opposes. Woodworth explains:

On the whole, it is believed that this work will be found equally interesting, as a history or a novel; and the lovers of each will find themselves pleasantly led from one to another of their own favorite scenes, without a very wearisome march through those of their opponents in taste. (1: xiv)

And further on: “In many respects I have studied the interest of the reader alone, by making short paragraphs and lessening the length of a chapter when its subject is dull, and increasing it when the incidents are interesting” (1: xvi).

*The Champions of Freedom* marks a critical moment of transition in American culture, and its experimental generic structure formally replicates that transition. As Edward Watts notes: “Clearly, there was a feeling even in the nineteenth century that Americans and their writing were still colonial, unable to express local experience and obedient to the commands of the centralized imperial metropolis in London. . . . [A]n anxiety about the lingering presence of colonial political and cultural institutions persisted for decades after Independence” (5). Woodworth acknowledges America’s nascent, inchoate identity by attempting to write a “complete History of the recent War” only a few months after it ends. The text’s formal oppositions, the genre-mixing that the classical friend so vigorously opposes, manifest the cultural paradox of writing a nation’s history almost as it occurs, but they also represent what is “monstrous” about America’s culture, the competing versions of an American nation: an “official” version that advocates a strong, centralized federal authority and other unofficial and unacknowledged ones that represent, among other things, a rising democratic populace. Past and present mix through the very act of combining official historical documents with
the popular romance forms of the present. But genres do not seamlessly mix in
Woodworth’s novel; rather, they have the effect of abrupt discursive shifts in the
narrative. Woodworth describes these shifts as a weaving of public and private histories:
“many private events have been interwoven with the thread of public history; without,
however, once losing sight of the direct line of chronology, which has been carefully kept
in view throughout the work” (1: xiii).

If we accept Michel de Certeau’s assertion that “[m]odern Western history
essentially begins with differentiation between the present and the past” (2),
Woodworth’s text, like the nation itself, tenuously straddles that boundary. For de
Certeau, modern historiography is built upon a break from the past; it stresses the present
by assuming that the past era no longer exists and that society has progressed beyond that
past time. In Woodworth’s case the recent war signified America’s break from an Old
World past, but as a narrative of national origins his version of history begins a
generation earlier with the fictional story of a common Revolutionary soldier who rises to
the rank of major while serving under Washington. Major Willoughby is the father of the
novel’s hero, George Washington Willoughby, who, through a series of trials eventually
comes of age during the War of 1812. George’s own private history represents an
originary myth of the nation, one that ultimately intersects with an official, and
thoroughly modern, “public history” of the War of 1812. These generic intersections, as
Woodworth is careful to point out, do not disrupt the historical chronology of the
narrative, but they do expose the uneasy relationship in America between popular legend
or myth and an emerging State-authorized national history. It is this mix that most
threatens the “classical friend” whose literary conservatism belies a more serious political
and ideological one. The divisions the friend supports maintain a clear distinction between the authority of history and that of fiction. For the friend historical discourse correlates with Enlightenment rationalism; the authority of empirical discourse is threatened when mixed with the irrational discourse of fiction. When the friend argues that “the greatest monster of all is your Mysterious Chief” he seizes upon Woodworth’s most radical departure from official history, the ghostly figure of a Native American who appears to George and his father in moments of crisis throughout the narrative. The friend asks Woodworth: “But why introduce anything supernatural? Is that necessary to your plot?” Woodworth responds: “Just as necessary . . .as a tail to a devil” (1: xiv), and then proceeds to tell a short story about a painter who rejects orthodoxy and thumbs his nose at critics by painting Milton’s Satan without horns, hooves, and tail.

Woodworth’s ironic response to the friend effectively asserts the cultural authority of unofficial histories as parables. The short story becomes a way of explaining and controlling the experimental narrative, and by extension, a new and different nation itself. The story’s lesson also asserts the cultural authority of artists by making a case for [American] innovation and rejection of orthodoxy. When a curate calls the artist heretical for not obeying the rules of properly representing the devil, claiming that the work will be rejected by the world, the painter defies him and says: “This painting shall not be altered; and if all the world reject the devil, we can do without clergymen” (1: xvi). The story, then, affirms artists and subordinates critics, an atypical reversal in America at a time when critics generally led the call for a new national literature.5 Finally, by responding to a direct question with a short story Woodworth literally

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5 William Tudor, Walter Channing, and others at the *North American Review* were outspoken advocates for American literary nationalism. They launched the magazine in May 1815, one of the earliest attempts to assert an American literary identity.
performs the kind of discursive shift that characterizes the whole subsequent narrative. What had been a dialog in the present suddenly shifts to a third person tale that takes place in France a century earlier; genres do not so much blend as abruptly displace one another. 

Typically, prefaces in early historical novels establish de Certeau’s differentiation between past and present. They function as frames for the subsequent historical narrative by establishing an author’s voice in the present. There are even common tropes for such prefaces: Hawthorne’s found manuscript in “The Custom-House” preface to *The Scarlet Letter* is perhaps the most famous example of a convention that had been used for decades. But Woodworth’s preface deliberately blurs such boundaries, and not simply because the text addresses recent events. An open dialog between an advocate for a conservative literary style and an unorthodox, experimental writer actually becomes a debate over how to represent history and whether popular fictional forms have a place in such representations. Rather than resolve the issue, Woodworth responds dialogically with a parabolic short story, but that formal interruption of the debate, perhaps better than anything else, captures what is unresolved in America. The blurred boundary between text and preface exposes America’s own blurred boundary between past and present; it literally enacts American cultural ambiguity as it emerged from the War of 1812. Within the national narrative Woodworth juxtaposes modern State-authorized historiography based upon official documents against popular first-person accounts that more closely

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6 Woodworth’s abrupt discursive shifts and interpolated forms are highly suggestive of a period of literary transition and genre evolution: “It is interesting that the functions of all stylistic means and devices are dependent on the definition of the genre. . . . It is impossible to think of genre as a static system for the reason that genre-consciousness itself arises as a confrontation with a traditional genre (i.e. as a result of a sense that the traditional genre has been supplanted, even partially, by a ‘new’ one occupying its place). The point is that the new phenomenon supplants the old one, occupies its place, and, without being a ‘development’ of the old, is at the same time its substitute” (Tynyanov 32).
resemble legend or myth; in the gap between those two opposing forms of discourse emerges the classical friend’s greatest objection, a Native American ghost who utterly complicates and destabilizes a dialectical opposition.

Woodworth positions himself, however tentatively, as the narrative voice of an emerging American nation in a way that attempts to direct, in specifically moral terms, the “will of the people.” Eric Hobsbawm sees the formation of modern nations in very much the same light, as “dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings, and interests of ordinary people” (10). Modern nations are perhaps best defined as discursive structures that represent a certain collectivity, whether that be an official state-authorized version of the “people” or a more localized expression of identity. They are found both in the formal authoritative constructions of the state and “in the ordinary persons who are the objects of their actions and propaganda” (11). As a controlling voice guiding the actions of the narrative, Woodworth constructs a national allegory that speaks “from above,” but that is designed to appeal to a reading audience of “ordinary people,” of novel readers. Woodworth’s narrative voice provides an official historical account of the recent war. He appropriates the historian’s authority at a time when fiction, especially the novel form, is associated with idleness, frivolity, even immorality. Speaking of opposition to the early American novel, Cathy Davidson points out that it “may well have reached its particular level of vehemence because the novel was established here in the wake of the Revolution, at a time when disturbing questions (witness the Constitutional debates) about the limits of liberty and the role of authority in a republic were very much at issue” (41).
The Champions of Freedom in its form embodies a paradox of authoritarian historical discourse and anti-authoritarian novelistic discourse. But this goes deeper: the formal paradox speaks to a perceived need to control a rapidly expanding popular democracy through an authoritative but also moralistic voice, one that reinforces nationalist propaganda. In terms of the nation, Woodworth’s historical novel participates in the process of absorbing the threat of divisiveness posed by popular democratic discourse, while at the same time acknowledging that ultimately national authority comes from the “will” of those same people. Davidson writes, “many of America’s best educated and most illustrious citizens thought . . . [that the novel] genre provided a locus for their apprehensions about mobocracy on both the cultural and political level” (41), but the project of nationalism helps to transform those fears by consolidating the culture.

Woodworth’s novel absorbs discursive state authority by interpolating official documents and chronicling historical events. These counterbalance the often absurd contrivances of the fictional plot. For example, in the midst of tying up the loose ends of the narrative in the final chapter Woodworth interrupts: “Our hero has now completed his journal of the War, and as I have promised my readers another extract, I will here insert it” (2: 292). What follows are annals of the last year of the war written in the form of journal entries. Woodworth inverts the typical function of a highly personal genre, as he does with epistles in the narrative, but the effect bolsters the authority of the project as a whole. Historical interpolation makes his work more than just another nineteenth-century romance; furthermore, it incorporates national concerns into the agenda of those readers of romances and novels whose ordinary lives are nonetheless effected by state propaganda. The historical voice allows Woodworth to preside over the fictional national
allegory, which, in a sense, parallels the relationship between a state and its people in a representative democracy, but perhaps because federal authority is by no means certain at this point—and Woodworth attempts to totalize “the people” in his representation, the voice is tentative. The text never quite resolves this fundamental problem, and within the narrative abrupt formal shifts repeatedly disturb or disrupt narrative authority.

When George inserts his “JOURNAL of the War,” the act extends Woodworth’s stitching of public and private history. But this also opens the problem of a nation that is writing itself into being. As an annal, the journal merely lists a somewhat random series of events organized only by their chronology:

- **July 12.** General Smith was this day killed by a prisoner who had surrendered, in a skirmish near Fort George.
- **July 18.** Lieutenant Shelburne distinguished himself at Plattsburgh.
- **July 24.** Midshipman Ten Eyke, made prisoners of two British lieutenants, two warrant officers, and five seamen, in a house on Gardner’s Island, in the Sound. . . . (2: 292)

Unlike the typical rendering of first person daily experiences and observations, George has written his journal in a strictly objective form. He officially documents the events of the war that had not been addressed in the narrative, but this raises some interesting questions about where exactly the incipient nation stands in relation to its own history. By using the annals form for George’s journal Woodworth suggests that the newly come-of-age nation has yet to tell its story. Hayden White argues that in order to reach the status of historical narrative events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence.

Needless to say, also, the annals form lacks completely this narrative component, since it consists only of a list of events ordered in chronological sequence. (5)
White’s argument refers to medieval annalists who represent a pre-narrative version of history, one that does not require events to be explained as stories. Nonetheless, for Woodworth, White’s interrogation stands: “a genuinely historical interest would require that we ask not how or why the annalist failed to write a ‘narrative’ but rather what kind of notion of reality led him to represent in the annals form what, after all, he took to be real events. If we could answer this question, we might be able to understand why, in our own time and cultural condition, we could conceive of narrativity itself as a problem” (6). George’s reality, and by extension post-War of 1812 America’s, suggests that though its parts are in place, an official nation-state has yet to be assembled. George’s annals mark the present as another kind of originary moment, not for the nation but for the historian who would attempt to tell its story. This, as the preface suggests, is Woodworth’s function as artist, but both he and George are confronted by the problem of “making history.” George’s annals, rather than filling in the lacunae of Woodworth’s historical narrative, expose all that has been left untold.

Franco Moretti explains the tentative narrative voice in a work like *The Champions of Freedom* as destabilized by the conflict between an inherited Western form, like the novel and a “local narrative voice,” setting, and characters. In a formal sense local elements resist domination by foreign forms or narrative structures that cannot adequately speak for them, and the “local narrative voice” becomes “unstable . . . [because] the narrator is the pole of comment, of explanation, of evaluation, and when foreign ‘formal patterns’ . . . make characters behave in strange ways . . . then of course comment becomes uneasy—garrulous, erratic, rudderless” (“Conjectures,” *NLR* 65). Moretti complicates assumptions about inherited generic forms or Old World models by
allowing for resistance and experimentation. In Woodworth, as in other early historical novels, formal or generic instability correlates with the conflict between local identities and an emerging national one. This creates complexities that cannot be simplified into binary oppositions. Moretti writes:

> For me, it’s more of a triangle: foreign form, local material—and local form. Simplifying somewhat: foreign plot, local characters, and then, local narrative voice: and it’s precisely in this third dimension that these novels seem to be most unstable. . . (“Conjectures” 58)⁷

Moretti’s triangle permits the assumption that Americans used inherited Old World forms, as Woodworth does with the bildungsroman, the gothic, seduction plots, etc., but also recognizes local literary forms and sources like contemporary newspaper accounts, pamphlets, and literary journals. Woodworth’s novel is filled with these local forms. When young George Washington Willoughby, the hero of the national bildungsroman, leaves the family’s frontier home in Ohio to attend Harvard and make his way in the world, his father writes him a letter that Woodworth incorporates in the narrative. Among other bits of advice the letter warns against the dangers of political partisanship. The father, Major Willoughby, tells the popular story of a feud in Boston between a staunch Republican newspaper writer named Austin and a Federalist attorney named Selfridge that ultimately resulted in Selfridge killing Austin’s son in August of 1806. Selfridge was later acquitted of manslaughter by a Federalist court in Boston adamantly opposed to the encroachment of Jeffersonian democracy. The court’s decision led to popular demonstrations where Selfridge was hung in effigy on Boston Commons.⁸

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⁷ By “foreign form” or “plot” Moretti is referring to what he calls a “law of literary evolution” which involves “a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials,” including native characters, settings, and also local literary forms.

⁸ For a discussion of this episode in the context of Federalist resistance to Jeffersonian democracy see Richard Buel Jr.
Woodworth likely knew of this story from a popular pamphlet that circulated in 1807 providing an account of the disagreement between the parties, the subsequent murder, and the political furor over the trial. The symbolic significance of a son killed as a result of a father’s divisive partisanship is perhaps secondary to the larger formal issue of narrative disruption signified first by the intrusion of an epistle upon what had been a strictly third person narrative and secondly by the interpellation of a popular sensational narrative. Here a local form, a contemporary pamphlet about a murder case, appears within the inherited Old World epistolary form.

But even epistles are destabilized within Woodworth’s novel; instead of private personal reflections, epistles primarily chronicle events in the war. After young George is taken prisoner and removed to Quebec his father writes: “I know not if you are permitted to read newspapers, or have an opportunity of seeing those published in the United States. All that they have yet contained . . . formed the subject of my last letter” (1: 236). *The Champions of Freedom* reveals the complexities of American culture through such intrusions upon the narrative, intrusions perceived as monstrous aberrations at the time because they broke away from an Old World aesthetic that emphasized narrative continuity and generic stability. Criticism from this era repeatedly stresses the significance of literary models, and texts are evaluated based upon their faithfulness to such models, leaving little room for something that “differs from anything that has ever preceded it.” Woodworth’s novel, not surprisingly, arrives at a time when there is no dominant fictional genre in America, and thus the generic field, just like the national one, remains open to experimental possibilities. This has important implications for

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examining the relationship between genre and culture. Yuri Tynyanov, building upon the work of Viktor Shklovsky, writes:

And it is not just that the boundaries of literature, its ‘periphery’, its frontier regions, are unstable: no, it is the very ‘centre’ we are talking about. It is not a case of one single age-old stream moving and evolving, in uninterrupted succession in the centre of literature, while the new phenomena float in from the sides. No, these selfsame new phenomena actually occupy the centre itself, while the centre shifts down to the periphery. At a period when a genre is disintegrating, it shifts from the centre to the periphery, and a new phenomenon floats in to take its place in the centre, coming up from among the trivia, out of the backyards and low haunts of literature. (“The Literary Fact” 33)

The “backyards and low haunts of literature” refer to popular forms that make their way from common everyday genres into literary culture. Woodworth’s use of a sensational pamphlet disrupts the very center of formal expectations in the epistolary genre.

Furthermore, the first epistle disrupts the third person narrative. When young George finally moves out to attend Harvard, the national bildungsroman shifts to an initiation phase, where, as in all bildungsromans, the youth must make his own way in the world. In terms of narrative structure this is a moment of transition, a liminal space or passage that the initiate must go through in order to achieve independence and a stable identity, but the moment also self-reflexively epitomizes Woodworth’s own tentative control of the narrative. The first epistle from George’s father appears precisely at this transitional moment in the narrative. The epistle supplants what had otherwise been a strictly third person narrative and transforms the increasingly uncertain local narrative voice into an authoritative national one:

There is one subject on which I have said but little, and that is, politics. Your secluded situation, I presume, has hitherto preserved your mind from any undue prejudices against either of the two great political parties which exist in our country. . . . Preserve your independence, and never forget . . . that genuine patriotism exists in every section of the Union, and is not the
exclusive virtue of any party. . . . The farewell address of our beloved Washington, read next to your Bible. Make that your political creed, and you cannot err in your political conduct. “Frown indignantly on the first dawning of an attempt to alienate any portion of this country from the rest, or enfeeble the sacred ties which now link its various parts.”

This is the language of that god-like man, the friend of your father, and the father of his country. To me, there is a charm in the name of Washington that I can neither account for nor describe. . . . “The character of that wonderful man, equally above the reach of detraction and praise, is, literally, novum momentum in terris—a new and unheard of monument on earth. . . . But the character of Washington, passing the widest boundaries of nature, swells to a prodigy, and is all but miraculous.”

Always bear in mind that the ruler of any and every nation, represents, for the time being, the Governor of the Universe, in his kingly capacity. . . . Shun that politician of either party, who thinks it no impiety to damn the president: such a man is in grain a rebel. . . . This remark applies to every government under heaven, but in a peculiar manner to this free republic, where our rulers are appointed by a majority of the ruled. The president of the United States, therefore, not only represents in common with kings, the Governor of the Universe, but he represents him conjoined to his church on earth; for those citizens whose free suffrages elect a ruler, stand in the same relation to that ruler that the Christian church does to its divine head. (1: 92-94) 10

In addition to interpolating local, “peripheral” forms into the work, Woodworth frames his national narrative around a foreign, Old World form, the bildungsroman, but American materials “compromise” the form in ways that expose cultural contradictions and conflicts. When the “classical friend” from the preface refers to the Mysterious Chief as “the greatest monster of all” he speaks to a formal aesthetic problem that exposes a deeper cultural contradiction in America. The Mysterious Chief is an Indian “ghost” who appears in moments of crisis to guide the novel’s hero, young George Washington Willoughby, when passion tempts him away from duty to his country. In a formal sense, the chief represents a gothic subplot within the larger bildungsroman. Though these are both inherited Western forms—as will be shown later in the chapter—a

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10 Woodworth notes that the final quotation is from “the editor of the Port Folio,” but does not directly name Joseph Dennie, nor does he provide a specific issue and page number.
local character, a ghostly Indian Chief, ultimately destabilizes and resists colonization from both forms.\textsuperscript{11}

**Representing the Nation**

In the national narrative Woodworth constructs a democratic version of the American people that, through George, imagines a national Everyman, not a privileged aristocrat. George’s love, Catherine Fleming, is the daughter of a commercial manufacturer who loses his business shortly after the failure of the Irish Revolution of 1798. The Flemings come to the U.S. to free themselves from English political and economic oppression. Even the spatial dimension of George’s travels throughout the novel covers the geography of the nation as a whole.\textsuperscript{12} Through George, Woodworth allegorically represents the American “people” as confronted by a moral dilemma posed in the simple form of a binary opposition: either serve one’s personal interests and prosper individually or serve one’s country and sacrifice personal gain for the sake of a greater patriotic cause. This fundamental choice manifested itself in myriad ways in post-War of 1812 America: whether to support a Second National Bank over the easy money of unregulated state banks; or to fund federal projects for internal improvements over rapid expansionism and land speculation; or to honor existing treaties over confiscation and development of Indian lands, all represent choices that Woodworth

\textsuperscript{11} Moretti refers to this compromise of forms in a later essay as a “diagram of forces.” See Franco Moretti, “Graphs, Maps Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History—2,” *New Left Review* 26 (2004): 97. The phrase is taken from D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, 1942 (Mineola, NY, 1992), 16. Moretti continues: “for D’Arcy Thompson these forces are of two basic kinds: internal and external . . . . Shaped from without, as well as from within . . . . But so is narrative.”

\textsuperscript{12} It is worth noting that the geography of the narrative effectively completes a circuit of the nation, and not only includes American designs on Canada, but also incorporates transnational issues involving the Caribbean. Thomas Sandford kidnaps Catherine with the intention of bringing her to a plantation in the West Indies, but he is intercepted and summarily executed by the pirate Jean Lafitte who then takes Catherine back to Louisiana where she is reunited with George after the Battle of New Orleans. Lafitte’s crew are described as refugees from St. Domingo who were also asked to leave Cuba when Napoleon declared war against Spain. They become pirates after American law forbids them from importing their slaves.
contextualizes as moral questions of self versus nation. By conceiving the threat to national unity as a moral allegory where young George must choose between the vices of personal pleasure and the virtues of selfless duty, Woodworth consolidates social, political, and cultural conflicts in America and simplifies these oppositions.

The novel’s climactic chapter where George actually fails in his choice of allegiance because he follows his “natural” inclination towards familial love rather than his duty to the larger national cause perfectly illustrates Woodworth’s moral oppositions in the narrative. On the night before the triumphant American attack on Fort Erie, George is duped by a false letter telling him that his love Catherine is dying:

A severe struggle now took place in his bosom—a contest far more dreadful than any which could await him on the peninsula. On one hand Duty, Patriotism, Honor, urged their imperious claims—on the other stood weeping Love and meek-eyed Pity, pointing in expressive silence to the dying Catherine. To ask leave of absence at that moment was worse than a thousand deaths. . . . Nature triumphed—and the rising sun which beheld the banner of Freedom waving triumphantly on the walls of Fort Erie, saw captain Willoughby outflying the wind, with his back turned on the scene of glory. (2: 248)

George fails by caving to sentiment and the discourse of feeling—“weeping Love and meek-eyed Pity”—rather than the nation’s “imperious claims”—clearly a loaded phrase as the emergent nation would increasingly assume the path of imperium through a coercive westward expansion. Only another timely appearance by the “Mysterious Chief” mitigates George’s personal failure and symbolically redirects the nation’s wayward course:

George. And is my journey then a crime?

M.C. No—but the selfishness which prompted it is an enemy to your happiness . . . . Patriotism, I told you, must rise superior to all selfish considerations, and I assured you, that if any object was suffered to stand
Nationalist discourse, then, aligns itself with the rhetoric of unity and personal sacrifice, and the villains of the narrative enact the opposition to that value system.

Thomas Sandford and Sophia Palmer represent the national threat of an immoral or unprincipled populace that the narrative alienates from the nation. Both are portrayed as voluptuaries, but have different functions: Sandford is George’s antithesis, his foil; Sophia is a passionate temptress who functions as a moral exemplum. Sandford “had lost his father at an early age and was the ruined victim of maternal indulgence” (1: 97). Jealous of George’s virtuous behavior, Sandford determines to seduce him into abandoning the values inculcated by his father:

He began by occasionally expatiating on the pleasures of sense in the most glowing and exuberant language he could command, and took frequent opportunities of reading to him the poems of the voluptuous Moore, and others who like him have prostituted their talents in giving to the haggard looks of vice the most exquisite coloring and captivating softness. (1: 98)  

Sandford’s vicious character highlights the virtuous qualities of George’s upbringing. He exemplifies what Woodworth perceives as the iniquities of contemporary American society, all of which result from being raised in an inappropriate environment. It is this aspect that pertains particularly to the national allegory.

The young nation can only succeed if cultivated in a properly virtuous environment, and the modern American nation builds upon this foundational rhetoric.

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13 The profound irony of putting these words in the mouth of an Indian Chief obviously complicates a national narrative built around the binary opposition of self versus nation—as do all Native American characters in the narrative—and this will be addressed later in the chapter.

14 “Moore” is the Irish poet Thomas Moore, close friend of Byron, who disparaged the U.S. after a trip to the states in 1803. Ironically, Moore was in many ways an Old World counterpart to Woodworth. He achieved fame as a songwriter and poet, composing lyrics for ancient Irish melodies. Though in 1816 Moore’s nationalist sentiment was not entirely clear, he did eventually become, and remains to this day, the “poet of Ireland.”
Ernest Gellner defines this concept with the term nationalism, and argues that it “is in reality the consequence of a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high culture” (48), what Hobsbawm refers to as the “invention of tradition” and Homi Bhabha calls a “pedagogical object” that “founds its narrative authority in a tradition of the people” (“DissemiNation” 299). For all three theorists, nationalism represents a top-down discursive structure that functions pedantically, though Gellner locates nationalist authority in the State and Bhabha and Hobsbaum in “tradition.” The significance of education is critical: Woodworth’s allegory suggests that environment determines character, though he readily acknowledges the Calvinistic belief in human depravity and the importance of religion in one’s education. George argues that Sandford’s romantic sophistries are the product of degeneration, “of hereditary propensities to evil . . . [which must be] arrested in their descent, by the reformation and regeneration of the few who are wise enough to see the necessity of such a change” (1: 109). Regeneration can only take place where an individual has proper guidance.

The closing lines of the novel (delivered by the “Mysterious Chief”) emphasize “that it is the duty of every parent to believe that his children are specially destined by Heaven for a life of peculiar usefulness—in order that he may be thereby induced to prepare them for such a life,” but this special destiny is “actuated . . . by the Spirit of Washington” (2: 296). The prerogatives of nationalism subsume religious instruction, consolidating a new American identity. Americans are not Puritans, who did believe that they were specially destined by Heaven; rather, to use Gellner’s term, the “cultural shred” of Puritan belief is appropriated to serve nationalist education: it is the “duty” of parents
to believe that their children are specially destined so that they may prepare them to be useful citizens. Education inculcates the social system of a nation; furthermore, Gellner, following Durkheim, argues that “in a nationalist age, societies worship themselves brazenly and openly,” and clearly this is the shift that the passage articulates (56).

Sandford highlights the failings of an Old World aristocracy that Woodworth alienates from the nation in both a moral and geographic sense: he squanders multiple inheritances from English heirs, arranges a treasonous plot through his Canadian uncle, and ultimately tries to flee to a West Indian plantation. Thus, Woodworth conflates the physical borders of the nation with its moral ones. For Sandford, family represents a source of wealth and nothing more; the exact opposite of George whose duty to honor his father is second only to patriotic duty. In a rhetorical move that is somewhat atypical for Early Republican romances, Woodworth never conflates family and nation. Even as he allegorizes the young nation through George, the narrative equates national duty with serving God. George’s failures are caused by personal indulgence, and Sophia Palmer represents the passionate indulgence that leads to George’s waywardness.

Sophia is consistently portrayed as overly passionate. She falls in love with George from afar, but after mistakenly overhearing that he has been killed in battle, becomes despondent and agrees to marry an older German merchant whom she does not love. When she sees George in a theater later that year she abandons her husband to follow him, going so far as to disguise herself as a boy to become George’s personal attendant. Gradually, she insinuates herself into George’s private affairs and seduces him after reciting some poetry and tearing open her shirt in a passionate recognition scene.15

15Throughout the novel, the arts—theater, poetry, music—invoke passionate indulgence which, like vengeance, ultimately interferes with selfless duty to one’s country. The irony here is that Woodworth’s
Woodworth directly connects passion with selfishness and ultimately the rejection of the larger national cause. George tells Sandford, “Our passions were never bestowed by God, but are the perversion of good affections, which were given to make us happy” (1: 108). That is, the gift of “good affections” was perverted into passion when humans turned away from worshipping the source of those affections: “Every affection that had been given to promote his [humankind’s] happiness, was changed by himself into a lawless passion, productive of the keenest misery” (1: 108). In the end Sophia becomes a prostitute and, utterly abandoned to vice, dies of a venereal disease. She loses the war within herself between selfish passion and dutiful constancy, the obverse of George’s own battle, and therefore the one that the American “people” must fight. Woodworth effectively sums up this theme by inserting a chapter in the form of a Socratic dialogue between George’s father, Major Willoughby, and a friend. The major states:

No, sir, I never had an enemy. I lost a hand, not in fighting for myself, but in defending my country. Though my sword has tasted blood, my feelings and passions had no agency in the act. I felt that I was engaged in a duty similar to that in which we are engaged in fighting and subduing our internal spiritual enemies, our evil propensities, which we are commanded to overcome and destroy, though dearer to us than life. For as we do one for the welfare and happiness of the country which protects us, so we perform the other for the promotion and extension of our Redeemer’s kingdom; and our share of felicity in each is always proportionate to the uses we perform for both. (1: 55-56)
The connection between self and country is clear; moreover, by conflating religious duty with national duty Woodworth “moralizes” national narrative. The “people” represented by George in the allegory must overcome selfish desires not just to win the battles of the War of 1812, but also to promote and extend a national system whose sum is greater than its parts. When the “Mysterious Chief” intercedes with George to save him from dissolution at the hands of Sophia, he says, “Every trial is beyond the strength of a man who trusts his own powers alone . . . . You had forgotten this important truth, though it has been so often inculcated by your virtuous father, and you was permitted to fall . . . to become fully convinced of your own weakness, when not upheld by the hand of mercy” (2: 147).

*The Champions of Freedom* responds to the call of literary nationalism after the War of 1812 by consolidating history in a way that reveals a line of descent from the Revolution to the present so as to project an image of a unified nation and people. In *The Champions of Freedom* the fictional narrative intersects with select historical events at particular moments of national ambivalence. The two fictional villains, Thomas Sandford and Sophia Palmer, not only conspire against young George Willoughby and his love Catherine Fleming, but they also end up directly affecting the outcome of the War of 1812. Sandford and especially Sophia appear, not as allegorical figures that correspond with historical events, but as fictional characters who literally intervene in

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16 I’m following the concept of what Eric Hobsbawm calls the “revolutionary-democratic” concept of the nation which equates sovereign citizens with the state and thus the nation, as opposed to the “nationalist” conception of the nation which is “derived from the prior existence of some community distinguishing itself from foreigners.” (22). See “The Nation as Novelty” in *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 14-45.
historical events and serve the narrative function of thematizing and explaining the historical sequence as a way of marking the ascendancy of the nation.

Sandford is a captain in the American army temporarily placed in charge of Fort Niagara in the winter of 1813 while the American Northern Army, under the leadership of General Wilkinson, begins a fall offensive with the goal of taking Montreal and winning control of Upper Canada before going into winter quarters. For Woodworth, this event is a climactic turning point both in the war and in the novel. He assigns the failure of an American imperial conquest of Canada to the treasonous actions of Sandford and his agent, Sophia. Sophia, after being spurned by George, becomes Sandford’s lover. In her willingness to avenge herself upon George, Sophia engages in Sandford’s elaborate plot to kidnap Catherine Fleming and defect to the British side. Disguised as a boy, Sophia slips across the Niagara River and informs the British of the Northern Army’s expedition in exchange for money and protection for herself and Sandford. The two subsequently desert to Quebec, and Fort Niagara is surprised and taken in a bloody massacre.

Fort Niagara was taken in the middle of the night on December 19, 1813 after a gate was left partly open by sentries changing shifts. Historically, the fort was a linchpin to the whole American frontier, and its loss marked the final turn of events in the War of 1812 in terms of America’s hopes for gaining control of British Canada. In

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17 The American navy, under the guidance of Perry, had by this time largely won control of lakes Erie and Michigan, and therefore had opened the path into Canada. Though it encounters some success along the way, the American army does not succeed in marching all the way to Montreal, and the offensive is abandoned in November, with the Northern army withdrawing to winter quarters on the American side of the St. Lawrence river at French Mills, New York. Rather than go into winter quarters themselves, the British immediately began a bold winter offensive in December 1813, first taking back Fort George on the Canadian side of the Niagara River and then crossing over to retake Fort Niagara, which in turn led to the fall of the whole Niagara frontier in America, including Lewiston and Buffalo.

retrospect, the failure to take Canada in the winter of 1813 was the final opportunity to eliminate a British foothold on an important trade route in North America. If America had gained control of Montreal and the St. Lawrence River, dominance of the Western Hemisphere would have been a foregone conclusion. Woodworth’s fictional narrative hinges upon the significance of this particular interpretation of events. The juncture between the historical narrative and the fictional one is a seam held together by the ideological thread of nationalism. Woodworth ties the failure to conquer Canada with the fictional plot of treason by Sandford and Sophia in an effort that “performs the problematic totalization of the national will” (Bhabha 311). Thus, despite the fact that from its beginnings the War of 1812 divided Americans and almost resulted in the secession of New England,19 Woodworth characterizes the fall of the Niagara frontier in the following way:

So disastrous a termination of the campaign, filled every patriot bosom with surprise and indignation. The representatives of the people immediately demanded of the president the causes of these disgraceful effects [italics mine]; and, in obedience to this demand, the records of the war-department were submitted to public inspection. But little light, however, was thrown upon the subject from that quarter, and it still remained enveloped in the gloom of doubt and uncertainty. This cloud is finally removed—a flash of inspiration from the historic muse, has at length dissipated the illusive vapors of conjecture, and the reader can now trace the whole concatenation of disasters to the black eyes, and still blacker heart of Sophia. (2: 246)

This brief passage combines all the major thematic and structural implications of Woodworth’s experimental literary history. He openly acknowledges that the historical events involved in the fall of the Niagara frontier are a matter of public record. In his capacity as a historian Woodworth carefully follows the chronological details of the

19 Woodworth’s earlier poem, The Heroes of the Lake testifies to the rampant factionalism in America during the war. Also see Richard Buel, Jr., America on the Brink.
war’s events, drawing upon the official authority of war-department records for support. Yet, he also represents himself as an authoritative interpreter of these events, as one who is answering questions raised by “the people,” and herein lies the particular function of the fictional narrative. The loss of the Niagara frontier, even after a close inspection of the documented record of events, is still “enveloped in the gloom of doubt and uncertainty.” The historical events are simply a series organized by chronology; they don’t tell “the story” of how America lost its opportunity to gain complete control of North America. The rational explanation for the American losses is simple incompetence and a wavering will. American militiamen returned to their farms for the winter, and American generals miscalculated the British will to continue fighting into the winter months. But such explanations contradict Woodworth’s nationalist strategy; hence they must be forgotten or ignored. If the particular turn of events throws the will of “the people” into question, then that national will cannot be essentialized and ambivalence enters the equation. Woodworth’s fictional narrative intersects with problematic or potentially ambivalent historical events in order to reinforce a nationalist agenda. The fictional plotting serves a clear ideological purpose, instead of simple titillating romance for “idle” novel-readers.

Implicit in the national allegory is the contemporary debate between individual state’s rights and a consolidated federal authority. Woodworth writes narrative history “in the consciousness of the threat to a specific social system and the possibility of falling into a condition of anarchy against which the legal system might have been erected” (White 13). Both Sandford and Sophia, through their treasonous public behavior, directly threaten national security, but their private moral failings also undermine the framework
that supports nationalism. Woodworth’s novel arrives at a moment when the validity of federal laws was debated within the branches of the American government, especially the Supreme Court. The most important Constitutional debates in the years following the War of 1812 dealt with the issue of states’ rights versus federal authority. These debates had profound implications, not only for the future of the nation, but also in terms of how the nation’s past would be narrated.\textsuperscript{20} That is, the struggle implied more than rights; it also involved the shift from a colonial to a national identity, a kind of consolidation that meant reconceptualizing America, and narrative clearly participated in such an act. The victory of federal authority over state’s rights turned on a rhetorical point, an interpretation of ambivalent language in the Constitution, wherein the Supreme Court determined that the federal government represents the authority of “the people,” and the will of “the people” takes precedence over the rights of states.\textsuperscript{21} In particular, Justice Joseph Story’s opinion in \textit{Martin v. Hunter’s Lessee}, delivered on March 12, 1816, established the legal foundation for the subsequent decisions by the Marshall Court, decisions that reinforced and consolidated federal authority. Story writes:

\begin{quote}
The Constitution of the United States was ordained and established not by the States in their sovereign capacities, but emphatically, as the preamble of the Constitution declares, by “the people of the United States” . . . . It is the voice of the whole American people solemnly declared, in establishing
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{20} In \textit{Constituting Americans} (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) Priscilla Wald explores the problems created by the “official story” of citizenship and personhood generated by the Constitution and subsequent narratives by those excluded from the legal status of personhood, such as Indians, women, and slaves, all of which subvert the authority of the Constitution’s official story. Her focus is primarily on later antebellum narratives and on the legal suppression of individual personhood and identity, while my own concentration is on how earlier narratives address many of these same problems through the consolidation of form.

\textsuperscript{21} For more on the Supreme Court’s role in the consolidation of federal authority and a good general discussion of the political and economic development of the nation in the decade after the War of 1812 see Charles Sellers, \textit{The Market Revolution} (New York: Oxford, 1991), especially “Let Us Conquer Space,” 70-103.
one great department of that Government which was, in many respects, national, and in all, supreme.²²

Of course, resting the authority of the federal government within such an ambiguous term as “the people” becomes a central problem and a source of ambivalence that makes itself felt in the Champions of Freedom and in every subsequent attempt to narrate the nation. Homi K. Bhabha succinctly articulates the problem:

the reference to a ‘people’—from whatever political or cultural position it is made—[becomes] . . . a problem of knowledge that haunts the symbolic formation of social authority. The people are neither the beginning or [sic] the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population. (DissemiNation 297)

Woodworth’s novel teeters upon the very “edge” that Bhabha describes by embodying the cultural ambivalence of its moment in American history. Its nationalism fully participates in “the symbolic formation of social authority,” but its generic form and narrative inconsistencies reveal the problematic nature of any attempt to consolidate the many contesting voices of the nation. Narrative history is intimately “connected with a desire . . . to represent (both in the sense of writing about and in the sense of acting as an agent of) an authority whose legitimacy hinged upon the establishment of ‘facts’ of a specifically historical order” (White 19). Woodworth’s text serves the cultural function of reinforcing the same federal authority that the Supreme Court was trying to establish. The act of nation-building could not simply be legislated; it also required the support of historical narrative.

When the Willoughbys move from Boston to Ohio, they make a transition from urban corruption to idyllic pastoral setting. Woodworth portrays the move as a retreat

from impending corruption for a new generation, a corruption connected to the Old
World in both a moral and physical sense. Before the move from Boston two older
daughters die in an outbreak of smallpox which Woodworth conflates with the spread of
immorality:23

[The major] readily foresaw, that if this growing evil continued, the rising
 generation would prove but weak and puny representatives of their heroic
 fathers, the champions of American freedom. He lamented that it was not
 in his power to prevent so great a national calamity, but wished at any rate
 to save his son, by snatching him in season from the sphere of contagion,
 and placing him beyond the reach of its influence. (1: 29)

Major Willoughby builds an Eden “in the western wilderness [living] not as a hermit; but
as a Grecian philosopher, with an unfrequented grove for his academy, and his darling
children his only pupils” (1: 29). As a nation-building text intent upon mythologizing
national origins and allegorizing subsequent history, The Champions of Freedom depicts
the new nation as emerging from an ahistorical setting. The major moves his family
away from “contagious” Old World influences into an uncontaminated virginal space,
and then forms a mythical American nation out of this “empty” space. Thus Woodworth
writes: “George Washington Willoughby was the child of Nature. . . . On one hand rose
an almost impenetrable forest, on the other rolled the waves of an inland ocean” (1: 32).
Yet, despite the author’s best efforts, the narrative cannot maintain the “purity” of such a
utopic mythical space; instead, the actual historical figure Chief Logan intrudes upon
Woodworth’s myth of national origins.

23 See Shirley Samuels, Romances of the Republic (New York: Oxford, 1996), especially “Plague and
Politics in 1793: Arthur Mervyn,” 23-43. Samuels convincingly traces the association in Republican
literature between the spread of contagious diseases and the influx of immigrants, particularly from Jacobin
France.
Woodworth’s Native Americans: Complicating the National Narrative

The chapter immediately following the description of an idyllic retreat where the “infant Hercules” is being raised begins: “The only human visitants, that had ever interrupted the profound solitude of the Willoughby family, were warriors and hunters belonging to a neighboring tribe of friendly Indians [italics mine]” (1: 138). In The Champions of Freedom Native Americans represent a pattern of profound ambivalence and narrative interruption that, like a fault line, disturbs the boundaries between history and myth. Indians stand between history and prehistory, representing a conflict that Woodworth resolves by consigning them to a “signifying space that is archaic and mythical,” (Bhabha 300), an act that quite deliberately blurs the boundary between progressive historical discourse and popular legend. The discourse of nationalism emerges between history and legend as a means of mending the rupture through which alternate voices emerge. No character better exemplifies the ambivalent intersection of myth and history than Woodworth’s Logan. Logan first became famous in American culture for giving a speech that Jefferson refers to in Notes on the State of Virginia. The speech is quoted as proof of the eloquence of its rhetoric, which Jefferson claims compares with the greatest of Greek and Roman oratory. Logan refused to attend peace negotiations for Lord Dunmore’s War—a war fought against the expansion of American

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24 The son of a French father and Cayuga Indian mother, Logan had been friendly to white settlers until his family was massacred in 1774 in an event that ultimately triggered Lord Dunmore’s War, the result of which was to open white settlement and further land speculation beyond the Ohio River in the Northwest Territory. Not only did he lose all of his family in the events leading to Lord Dunmore’s War, but also Logan himself did not live beyond the Revolution. After fighting for the British side in the American Revolution, he was murdered in 1780 by his closest surviving relative, a cousin, who later explained that he was ordered to kill Logan because the chief was preventing peace by inciting other Indians to continue fighting white settlers.

25 Anthony F. C. Wallace calls Logan’s story “a paradigm for Indian-white relations, not only in Jefferson’s time, but for later generations as well. The story of Logan embodies a tragic, self-fulfilling philosophy of history that describes the process by which the fall of the Indian nations and the acquisition of their land would be accomplished” (2).
settlers in western Virginia—instead, he wrote a speech that eloquently expresses his grief and justifies his retaliation against the settlers who murdered his family: “There runs not a drop of my blood in the veins of any living creature. This called on me for revenge. . . . Who is there to mourn for Logan?—Not one” (Jefferson 100).

Jefferson’s narrative of Logan, which helped to conceal land speculating interests and westward expansion, portrays the Indians as a heroic but soon to be extinct civilization. Yet Jefferson’s Logan has a different function from Woodworth’s. Woodworth, rather than elegizing Logan, literally revitalizes and makes him into a symbolic savior and cultural intermediary. In the fall of 1813 when the outcome of the war was by no means certain for Americans, Woodworth composes his first version of the Logan myth. He calls The Heroes of the Lake an “epic poem,” but in many ways it contains all the elements that he would rework two years later in his postwar novel.26 In the poem Logan is closer to his historical original—his family has been murdered and he is the sole survivor—but the murderers are British rather than American settlers and the atrocities take place during the War of 1812, not in the Revolutionary era. Logan avenges himself but is mortally wounded, and dies “the whiteman’s friend” at the feet of the poem’s hero young Perry, who was at the time captain of the warship Lawrence (24).

Woodworth’s epic Logan has the supernatural function of the Mysterious Chief in The Champions of Freedom; he prophesies American victory, but then Tecumseh appears and modifies that prophecy, claiming that American factionalism and general disunity has

26 In the preface Woodworth claims to be following the plan of the author of “The Wanderer of Switzerland” (James Montogomery, 1811). The final lines of the poem make the theme abundantly clear: “Forego the suicide!—Unite and live! / Disunion’s stab thou never canst survive! / Haste, crush the monster! / Heal the breach, unite, / And banish discord to his native night! / Unite, and victory stoops upon your arms! / Unite, and bid adieu to war’s alarms! / Unite, and prosper—ev’ry blessing share— / Persist, and wed the spectre of despair!” (77).
allowed Canada to be saved for the British and if continued could cost the Americans the whole war. The poem’s notes explain the supernatural prophecies as part of Native American culture, and though they are as central to the narrative structure of the poem as the Mysterious Chief is to that of the novel, their place in the nation is not central to Woodworth’s theme. Because the War of 1812 presented such a threat to the future of the young republic the poem emphasizes national unity, but victory in the war created an “era of good feelings” in America characterized by speculative optimism about the nation’s future.27

*The Champions of Freedom* incarnates its cultural moment by recognizing the emergence of new forms of democratic expression but then suppressing the threat that those forms pose. In particular, Woodworth places Native Americans at the crossroads of historical representation, implicitly responding to the threat posed by a cultural presence that precedes the modern nation. The national narrative begins during the Indian Wars, and its growth depends upon the guidance of Native American characters. In *The Champions of Freedom* Woodworth divides the literary function of Native American characters further than he had in *The Heroes of the Lake*, creating on one hand the allegorical figure of the Mysterious Chief and on the other maintaining the legendary figure Logan. While the Chief ultimately marks a figurative break between past and present, Logan marks a more specific site of ambivalence because he literally represents a boundary between “real history” and narrative myth. The fictional Logan suppresses an

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27 The term “era of good feelings” was coined in a Boston newspaper covering Monroe’s triumphant tour of the nation in 1817. New England in general had bitterly opposed the War of 1812, but the victory and Monroe’s tour suddenly galvanized America politically and also created a tremendous amount of financial speculation, all of which came crashing down with the Panic of 1819. See Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution*. 

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alternate history and opens a narrative space that Woodworth fills with his own nationalist voice.

In the year 1804, when George is ten, he saves Logan’s son from drowning by diving into a frozen lake. The Chief then saves both the boys by pulling George out while George pulls young Logan with him: “This little adventure created a chain of friendship too strong to be broken. Never were red and white so harmoniously mingled, and the union was too perfect for time to weaken” (1: 42). Of course, the real Logan had no heirs left after the murder of his family, but Woodworth’s new version supplants history with a myth of continuity and brotherhood. Instead of the common trope of the “dying Indian,” Woodworth suggests an ideal possibility; nonetheless, the question remains: why an actual historical figure rather than a fictional character? The answer lies in Woodworth’s need to appropriate Logan’s cultural authority. Since Jefferson, Logan had become one of the most important examples of Native American eloquence, the voice of an alternate history that articulates a pattern of exploitation, murder, and treaty violation in the West. Woodworth’s allegorical myth transforms Logan into a frontier guide who teaches the young nation (George) how to live off the land.

The fictional narrative of a rescue from a frozen lake figures as a symbolic myth of nation-building, unifying frontier settler with Native American. The American Adam, George Washington Willoughby, preserves Logan’s family from extinction by saving his only son, and Chief Logan, in turn, makes a future Indian-white friendship possible by saving both. Moreover, Logan becomes George’s teacher and survival guide while his father is his intellectual and moral one. Previous to the rescue, George has hostile

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28 For an interesting discussion of the many revisions of Logan’s story, though one that omits Woodworth’s versions, see Jorg Thomas Richter below.
feelings towards the Indians. He wants to avenge his father’s mutilation—a lost hand—in the Indian Wars of the 1790s, but the incident at the lake changes this course.

Woodworth describes the moment when George decides to dive into the water as “the crisis of his fate,” and Chief Logan’s rescue saves both generations from “descending forever” (1: 41). Afterwards, filled with the pride of his heroic act, George tells his sister, “Yes, Amelia, this is better than fighting” (1: 42).

In using Logan Woodworth demands that one of the most powerful and eloquent voices for an alternate history of the nation be forgotten. Bhabha explains such a strategy in terms of Ernest Renan’s theory that a nation is essentially created through the will of its people:29

Renan’s will is itself the site of a strange forgetting of the history of the nation’s past: the violence involved in establishing the nation’s writ. It is this forgetting—a minus in the origin—that constitutes the beginning of the nation’s narrative. . . . To be obliged to forget—in the construction of the national present—is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that performs the problematic totalization of the national will. (310-311)

Logan’s forgotten history, the slaughter of his family, the extinction of all heirs, even his own death brought on by opposition to U.S. expansion, exemplifies the violent and paradoxical origins of Woodworth’s national myth. The nation begins by forgetting, and Woodworth’s text initiates this cultural function in the American historical novel. As will be revealed in subsequent chapters, in their nationalist capacity American historical novels inevitably “forget” cultural antagonisms—race, class, even gender conflicts—in the interest of representing a unified “national will.” The Champions of Freedom

“performs” in the present by revising the past. Woodworth inverts Logan’s historical

29 Essentially Ernest Renan defines the nation as a spirit that is created through the will of its people, but in order to maintain its existence it must be continually reaffirmed through what he terms “a daily plebiscite.” See Renan, “What Is a Nation?” (8).
opposition to the U.S. as a way of totalizing the national will, making him the site of alterity and suppression that a modern nation-state can be built upon. The War of 1812 demonized Native Americans like Tecumseh who opposed westward expansion and allied themselves with the British enemy, but for Woodworth Logan signifies a problematic alternate history whose obliteration creates a break that allows America to begin from its own “empty” mythical prehistory.

Woodworth chooses a Native American figure who had been expressly compared by Jefferson to both Demosthenes and Cicero. For Jefferson the comparison was meant to elevate the stature of Native American civilization and reveal the rhetorical power that such a developed civilization had produced. But that civilization must be denied as a resistant or belligerent force because it subverts the essential American voice that Woodworth seeks from the mythical middle-space of cultivated nature. After the rescue at the lake Woodworth writes, “In the genuine language of nature Logan poured out his thanks to the heroic boy who had risked his own life to save a poor Indian’s” (1: 41). The Indian Logan draws his rhetorical power from virginal nature and his own native genius, not from a civilization that antedates the American nation.

In fact, one of the chief strategies in Woodworth’s national narrative involves displacing American origins almost literally upon Indian characters. Despite an ongoing American cultural problem with the continued presence of Native American civilizations within the boundaries of an emerging modern industrial nation, Woodworth attempts to elide present internal violence by placing it in a distant colonial past, a past that he severs from the narrative present. Yet, that repressed past returns in the form of the Mysterious Chief, what Bhabha calls a performative rupture of the pedagogical object. The Chief
first appears at the moment of the nation’s birth, marking America’s initial break from the past as a kind of supernatural rupture, rather than a logical sequence of progressive events. Significantly, this birth does not occur during the Revolution, the obvious choice for marking national origins; instead, George Washington Willoughby is born in 1794, during the decisive Battle of Fallen Timbers which ended the threat of Native American resistance to expansion in the Northwest Territory. While lying on a battlefield with a severed hand and various other wounds, Major Willoughby contemplates the fact that he can no longer use the sword given to him by Washington:

“O that I had a son to inherit this sword, since I can no more wield it myself. Had I but one son to give my country in my room. I would swear never to repine at this misfortune, or any other that may befall me. I had bound myself by a most solemn vow, never to relinquish this weapon but with life, and twice, this ill-omened day, has it been struck from my hand by a savage. O that I had a son to redeem my vow.”

“You have a son!” murmured a voice in a low but very distinct accent. Every eye was directed to the spot, where lay the lifeless body of a Miami Chief, who had fallen early in the action. . . . Each one was well convinced that there was neither life nor motion in the gigantic form before them; and that the words proceeded from no other source, they were, however, reluctantly, compelled to believe. . . . for the same words were repeated . . . for everyone present to hear and understand: “You have a son, to redeem your vow.”

More than eight hundred miles from the field of battle, at that moment, the wife of Willoughby was delivered of an infant. He was, at length, blest with a son! (1: 25)

George’s birth symbolically resitutes an American national narrative. In a temporal sense the new nation emerges with the successor generation, rather than the Revolutionary founders. Woodworth appropriates to his own generation the responsibility of constructing a nation, but that of course brings with it the problems

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30 Fallen Timbers was fought under the command of General “Mad” Anthony Wayne during the Indian Wars in what is now the state of Ohio. The victory confirmed American claims to the lands north of the Ohio River won from the British through the Revolution, though Native Americans had claims to the land from the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768.
created by revolution. The very hand that had been raised in violence during the revolution is severed as the Indian Wars come to a close. Thus Woodworth allegorically displaces Revolutionary violence by literally disconnecting it from the birth of the new nation. George’s birth, then, signifies a break with the violent past; moreover, in a geographic sense the narrative begins on the Western frontier, removing the nation from the entanglements of colonial history in the East. Yet, despite temporal and spatial distance from the Revolution, Woodworth still invents a myth of “regeneration through violence.”31 George’s birth occurs in a time of violence and begins a generational cycle that will reach maturation with the War of 1812 when Indian wars are renewed and he takes up his father’s sword to defend the country.

The Mysterious Chief emerges between the generational cycles, exposing a seam that represents violent national origins displaced upon Indians rather than British relatives. The ghostly appearance belies a smooth transition from father to son: not an enlightened historical progress, but rather an irrational moment steeped in violence, a gothic intrusion upon an otherwise believable sequence of events. The intrusion does not make narrative sense as part of modern historiography, but it certainly does as a literary enactment of an American cultural problem. At the moment of Woodworth’s composition Native Americans stood between the lands acquired through the Revolution and the construction of a nation-state that could unify the inhabitants within those boundaries. Their presence demanded either to be forgotten or repressed, if the nation

31 Richard Slotkin focuses on the regenerative cycle of frontier violence evading the issue of the Revolution and the problem of patricidal violence that it suggests. That is, Woodworth acknowledges that originary national violence must be resituated away from ancestral or genealogical history onto an Other, while Slotkin elides the problem by arguing that such a displacement had occurred as far back as the Puritan era. Curiously, Sacvan Bercovitch performs the same sort of elision in The Rites of Assent when he argues: “Those writers through whom the American imagination has been defined remained silent on the subject [of the Revolution], or at most ambivalent” (169).
was to represent one ideologically unified people with a coherent history. Native Americans are an unintelligible remainder for modern historiography; their culture has no place if the modern nation is to be built upon ideals of rational progress and industrial growth. This logic guided “progressive” thinkers in 1816 towards projects like Indian Removal and the newly formed African Colonization Society, which sought to dissociate Indians and blacks from the emerging nation.

But Woodworth remains enigmatic; like the painter in the preface short story, he defies orthodoxy with an ironic rather than a strict realism. Proclaiming the birth of a new nation through the body of a dead Native American profoundly ironizes national origins and affirms the kind of artistic license necessary for an honest depiction of what in 1816 certainly was a “monstrous” American nation. When in the preface he uses the metaphor of a thread that interweaves official public history and fictional private events Woodworth implicitly acknowledges that these offer differing versions of a national narrative, versions that speak to different “imagined communities” within America at the time. He sews—not weaves—together these two disparate communities through the “direct line of chronology,” hoping that time’s passage will tighten the stitch, but in 1816 Woodworth’s suture simply does not hold.

The final scene of the novel exemplifies the instability of the narrative seam. What had been a story taking place in the historical past, in the end becomes a discourse in the present. Like the preface, the last words are in the form of a dialogue, but this time between George and the Mysterious Chief. The gap between past and present, a gap that Woodworth portrays as the difference between an adolescent nation and a now adult one, should be resolved once George has successfully passed through his trials and the war has
ended, but the physical presence of a native American remains in the form of the Mysterious Chief. Once again, as in the preface, Woodworth attempts a figurative resolution, an allegory, as a method of closure, but all that had been tenuously held together throughout the narrative unravels when shifted to the present. George’s final act parallels Woodworth’s; the young hero sits down to finish writing his “JOURNAL of the War,” and the Mysterious Chief reappears, this time not to guide George through crisis—his problems have been happily resolved—but rather to resolve Woodworth’s failure to achieve closure:

As George recorded the last sentence, he raised his eyes in extacy, and discovered the Mysterious Chief at his elbow, who thus accosted him:

“You have at length become all I can wish—you have adhered to my precepts, and defeated a host of internal foes that were more dangerous to your peace than the British were to your country. You have conquered the former, by the assistance of Heaven—the latter were defeated by me, as the instrument of Heaven.”

   George. By you!
   M. C. Yes, by me.
   George. What then am I to think of you?
   M. C. Think of me as an ALLEGORY—and let it be recorded in your journal, that it is the duty of every parent to believe that his children are specially destined by Heaven for a life of peculiar usefulness—in order that he may be thereby induced to prepare them for such a life. I repeat—that as the instrument of Heaven, I achieved every victory which graces your Journal; because (let it be recorded) whenever Americans would succeed, either in peace or war, their counsels must be actuated and their heroes inspired by the--Spirit of Washington. (2: 296)

Woodworth responds to the rupture that yet remains between what the young nation has documented and the present post-war America by having the Mysterious Chief comment on what must be “recorded,” that is, on how to write the nation’s history. But the Chief only becomes another site of breakage or differentiation. In dividing the Chief’s body
and spirit, Woodworth bases a new American history upon the suppression of a Native American voice. De Certeau succinctly describes this historiographic act:

> [E]ach “new” time provides the place for a discourse considering whatever preceded it to be “dead,” but welcoming a “past” that had already been specified by former ruptures. Breakage is therefore the postulate of interpretation (which is constructed as of the present time) and its object (divisions organizing representations that must be reinterpreted). The labor designated by this breakage is self-motivated. In the past from which it is distinguished, it promotes a selection between what can be understood and what must be forgotten in order to obtain the representation of present intelligibility. But whatever this new understanding of the past holds to be irrelevant—shards created by the selection of materials, remainders left aside by an explication—comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies . . . (4)

The narrative that Woodworth had tenuously tied together as a bildungsroman of a young nation severed from the violence of the Revolution and Indian Wars of the former generation, one guided to maturity by the sage wisdom of a Native American mentor, suddenly unravels with the novel’s final words. A final act of reinterpretation supplants a Native American voice with that of George Washington, instantly dividing the figure of the Chief between a dead body (past) and a living spirit (present). Ironically, Woodworth’s final act tears apart all that he had carefully sought to weave together by affirming an ongoing present division between the national self (Washington’s spirit) and its other (in this case, a Native American body).

Washington as the spirit of the new nation is paradoxically manifested in the body of a Native American, and this is explained by Woodworth as an “ALLEGORY,” a term that by definition means to speak through an Other (from Greek *allos*, “other,” and *agoreuein*, “to speak”). This Other is not only the “monstrous” Mysterious Chief whose Native American body becomes a vehicle for Washington’s spirit; it is also official
history’s generic Other, the originary myth of the nation that has been left out of the modern national record. After George “completes” his journal, the Chief returns and twice requests that his presence “be recorded,” the second time parenthetically, suggesting Woodworth’s own anxious voice intruding upon the national narrative lest his readers miss its purpose. When the Chief tells George to “think of me as an ALLEGORY,” Woodworth invites ambivalence. The Chief signifies both a literal definition of an Other who is spoken through and a figurative interpretation of the nation as a geographic body inhabited by a new spirit, a spirit symbolized by the voice of Washington.

At the time Washington represented the quintessential cultural authority in America. Since his death and the publication of Parson Weems’ famous biography, the founding father had become the primary symbol of American values and identity. As Russ Castronovo argues, “Washington revealed a coherent American identity at a time when cultural authority resolutely brought the national narrative toward closure” (51).

Woodworth certainly draws upon the established cult of Washington and attempts to use it to achieve narrative closure, but the Mysterious Chief, a clearly divided figure, throws doubt upon the question of coherence, and further, the viability of closure. The rupture within the Chief ironically marks what Homi Bhabha refers to as “the uncanny moment of cultural difference”

[C]ultural difference intervenes to transform the scenario of articulation . . . [It] marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification, through processes of negotiation where no discursive authority can be established without revealing the difference of itself. . . . Cultural difference is to be found where the ‘loss’ of meaning enters, as a cutting edge, into the representations of the fullness of the demands of culture. (312-313)
Washington’s voice intervenes to articulate a new national identity that marks America’s break from its past, but the Chief’s very presence “serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification” (Bhabha 312). In the end, despite his best efforts to construct a national narrative built upon cultural inclusion and hybridity, Woodworth’s own voice interrupts, suppresses the Native American voice, and in so doing articulates America’s socio-cultural present, a present dominated by a political desire to homogenize and unify the nation.

*The Champions of Freedom*, through its open acknowledgment of American dichotomies—public versus private histories, self versus national will, body versus spirit, etc.—effectively thematizes incipient cultural divisions that later historical novels of the Revolution address in their own respective ways. In part, these acts of division, whether they signify a generational divide between the Revolutionary founders and their successors, or a separation between past colonial and present national identities, inevitably attempt to distance America from its violent origins. For Woodworth, this means displacing Revolutionary violence upon Indians and shifting America’s origins away from the thirteen colonies to the Northwest frontier, but for Cooper, Neal, Child, Cushing, and Gazer (pseudo.) the figurative solution to the problem of national history involves other displacement strategies that subsequent chapters will explore.
Chapter 2

“‘What is to become of our past revolutionary history?’: Negotiating Memory and History in Cooper’s *The Spy* and John Neal’s *Seventy-Six*”32

Introduction

In *The Champions of Freedom* Samuel Woodworth’s suppresses the problem of violent Revolutionary origins for an American national narrative by shifting those origins forward to the Indian Wars in the Northwest Territory in the 1790s. He displaces America’s violence against an Old World colonial oppressor, and in so doing facilitates the transition from colonized people to colonizing empire. In effect, Woodworth’s narrative elides Revolutionary violence in a way that affirms Sacvan Bercovitch’s theory:

The American Revolution plays a curious role in American classic literature. Like Beckett’s Godot, it is at once omnipresent and conspicuously absent. All contemporaneous accounts suggest that the Spirit of Seventy-Six was the muse of the American Renaissance. . . . Yet no more than a handful of . . . writings [by Melville, Hawthorne, Poe, etc.]—a few stories and minor novels—can be said to deal with the American Revolution, and even these do so obliquely, if not evasively.

The forgotten popular writers of the time responded avidly (in romances, poems, plays, and epics) to the clamor for literature about the Revolution. Those writers through whom the American imagination has been defined remained silent on the subject, or at most ambivalent. . . . America’s classic writers have given us splendid national heroes representing a variety of historical periods, including those of war and national upheaval. But none, apparently, found the Revolution fit matter for his highest themes. (*Rites* 169-170)

Bercovitch’s assumed boundary between “classic” American writers and popular ones simply does not hold up under scrutiny of the Antebellum archive. Rather, when taken as a whole, the archive suggests that the Revolution was an enormously important subject for American writers, and many repeatedly returned to it as a source for their work. For

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32 Thomas Jefferson asks this in a letter to Joel Barlow in 1811, specifically referring to Chief Justice John Marshall’s Federalist re-interpretations of the Revolutionary era.
that reason alone, we must conclude that the Revolution directly and profoundly affected American culture throughout the Antebellum period.

Ironically, Bercovitch elides the Revolution for many of the same reasons as Woodworth: both seek an explanation for America’s national narrative that suggests continuity and progress, and a Revolution against the Old World ruptures that. Bercovitch displaces Revolutionary origins by arguing that revolt began with the Puritans; Woodworth displaces origins upon on a mythical frontier paradise. Yet, as Bercovitch acknowledges, there was “a clamor for literature about the Revolution” beginning after the War of 1812 because--however problematic the assumption may be--most Americans mark the Revolution as the true source of national origins. Particularly in the 1820s, as the Revolution was passing from memory into history, debates raged in America over how to interpret and represent the Revolution. George Forgie writes: “The heroic age gave way to a post-heroic one not with the founding but with the deaths of the founders. Thus a focal point of mid-century nostalgia was the decade of the 1820s, the last one that could be seen as part of the beginning” (10). Historical novels participate in this nostalgia; they respond directly to the boundary between memory and history by telling stories that re-enact the past using historical events as a frame. De Certeau states: “In the case of historiography, fiction can be found at the end of the process, in the product of the manipulation and the analysis. Its story is given as a staging of the past . . .” (9).

James Fenimore Cooper and John Neal are two of the first American writers to use popular historical novels as a form for addressing the problem of the Revolution’s transition from memory to history. Rather than elide the Revolution, both writers
construct national narratives that specifically play along the memory/history boundary; thus, their novels engage the very generational issues that occupied the American cultural imagination as the nation approached its fiftieth anniversary. In *The Spy* (1821) Cooper suggests that the Revolution’s official histories conflict with memory, and the narrative attempts to resolve that conflict. The spy, Harvey Birch, represents the forgotten sacrifices of common Americans that Cooper weaves into the official aristocratic myth of the nation, a myth that portrays George Washington and the other “Founding Fathers” as patriotic gentlemen heroes. But, as will be shown, Cooper’s liminal exploration of memory and history invariably exposes other rifts where present, unresolved issues of race, gender, and class emerge and conflict with his control of an American national narrative. In *Seventy-Six* John Neal deliberately juxtaposes memory against history, but not to resolve their differences. Neal writes against the conservative ideological assumptions that undergird previous “dry” historical representations of the Revolution. In so doing, he enacts one of the earliest examples of a counter-narrative to America’s “federalized” nationalism. For Neal, memory asserts individual local experience that resists the abuses of generalized historical misrepresentations. He tells the story of the Revolution in the present through the words of an elderly, maimed Revolutionary veteran. The immediacy of a first-person narrator repeatedly intervenes and ruptures the

33 Franco Moretti specifically ties generational transition to the cycles of popular genres: “Books survive if they are read and disappear if they aren’t: and when an entire generic system vanishes at once, the likeliest explanation is that its readers vanished at once” (*Graphs* 20). I contend that the historical novel becomes a popular genre in America largely because its formal qualities speak to many of the concerns and anxieties of the “post-heroic” generation. Both Franco Moretti and George Forgie follow the sociological theories on generational groupings first established by Karl Mannheim. Mannheim, like Moretti, recognizes the cultural significance of the arts as a mark of generational change: “The aesthetic sphere is perhaps the most appropriate to reflect overall changes of mental climate,” (“The Problem of Generations” 279). Yuri Tynyanov articulates a theory of literary succession that supports much of what Moretti argues. He views genres as systems that “supplant” one another, and not necessarily through a gradual process or development: “what today is a literary fact, tomorrow may be a mere fact of life and disappear from literature” (“The Literary Fact” 33).
historical frame in a strategy that Neal utilizes to address unresolved issues from the Revolution. Thus, for Neal, as for Cooper, memories of common democratic heroes capture and help articulate the growing popular democratic voice of America in the 1820s.

**The Spy: Stressing the National, Forgetting the Local**

It is significant that criticism of *The Spy* often ignores the roles played by “subordinate” characters in the narrative while granting primacy to the aristocratic Wharton family. Politically divided and conflicted, the Wharton home certainly represents a rhetorical parallel between family and nation, and by resolving family difficulties in the end, Cooper does reinforce a theme of national unity. But I contend that allegorical renderings focusing solely on the family streamline the plot and ironically reenact the very issues of forgotten democratic sacrifices that Cooper asserts through a more complex allegorical structure. *The Spy* tells more than one story of the nation, but ultimately Cooper attempts to weave other stories of forgotten democratic figures into the national narrative, rather than offering alternate or subversive versions. He writes against notions of history—and much modern criticism—that narrate the Revolution as a story of “great men” and heroic events, but with a typical ambivalence that does not wholly reject the significance of the Founding Fathers. In a formal or generic sense, then, Cooper complicates “official” histories of the nation by constructing a narrative that draws upon forgotten local democratic sources, popular forms that represent different versions of the national narrative and what it signified for common Americans. As Wayne Franklin contends:

Cooper’s most important sources for his second novel were not literary at all. And they were overwhelmingly American in provenance. Derived
from Revolutionary War memoirs, personal anecdotes gathered from a number of quarters, and the political controversies gathered from the years following the War of 1812, they were multiform and multivalent. (“Invention” 416)

Basically, *The Spy* tells the story of the Wharton family, which has recently moved out of British-occupied New York City to the family estate in Westchester, the area known as the “Neutral Ground.” The “Neutral Ground” as a space represents shifting loyalties and conflicting ideologies, which are further reinforced by the temporal setting of fall 1780, just after the British Major André has been caught and, on Washington’s orders, hanged as a spy.34 The Wharton family itself is torn: the elder daughter, Sarah, has Tory sympathies and loves a British colonel, Wellmere; her younger sister Frances supports the Revolutionary cause and loves her Virginia cousin, Major Peyton Dunwoodie. When their brother, Henry Wharton, who is Peyton’s best friend and a captain in the British army, is captured after slipping through the American lines to visit his family, various plot complications and obstructions develop from torn loyalties between family and country, love and duty, friendship and honor. Gradually Cooper introduces a whole series of characters representing the many conflicting aspects of American society during the Revolution. The novel follows a course of adventures that

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34 André eventually became a subject of great controversy in America. Immediately after the Revolution he was characterized as a noble English gentleman, beloved by his captors for his aristocratic qualities (though ironically he was the agent for Benedict Arnold’s treasonous plans to hand over West Point). William Dunlap even wrote a play with Major André as the tragic hero (1798). But the controversy over André’s memory resurfaced after the War of 1812 when his yeomen captors requested an increase in the small pension that Congress had awarded them. Cooper in particular had little love for the heroic version of André whose remains were disinterred and moved to Westminster Abbey in 1821, shortly before *The Spy* appeared in print. There are myriad discussions of André’s significance in *The Spy*. For some of the more recent see Wayne Franklin, “The Invention of the American Novel” (411-424), and “Introduction,” *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (xxiii-xxiv). Margaret Reid also includes an interesting discussion of the developments in the André myth, *Cultural Secrets* (28-67).
culminate in Henry’s last minute escape from the gallows and the joyful marriage of Frances Wharton and Peyton Dunwoodie.

But this synopsis leaves out the novel’s most central character, the titular spy, Harvey Birch. Birch functions anonymously, remaining behind the scenes for most of the novel, yet, despite this covert role, he facilitates all of the novel’s action, and ultimately makes the happy ending possible. Most recent critics subordinate Birch’s role to the Wharton family story or the opposing marriage plots involving Frances and Dunwoodie as the patriot couple, and Sarah and Wellmere as the Loyalist-British one.

Shirley Samuels articulates such a reading:

Cooper focuses on a family whose political identifications and loyalties repeatedly interrupt the progress of the Revolution. The marriage plot, the most prominent in the novel, presents the familiar scenario of marital choices that are identical to political choices—what I have been calling a congruence model [where the rhetoric of marriage and state, family and government, are conflated].

But this plot is disrupted by another and rival set of concerns, concerns with the economic and commercial story of the new republican and bourgeois family . . . . This secondary plot presents the titular but also displaced subject of the novel, the peddler-spy marginalized in the neutral ground. In brief, Cooper’s “tale of the neutral ground” relates a transition from one model of family to another and a transition from one economic form to another, from an economy of landed aristocracy to an economy of portable bourgeois capitalism. Crucially, the divided loyalties that the novel portrays are recast in the divided form of the novel itself. . . . (64-65)

Samuels’ emphasis on primary and secondary plots and a formal division in the novel assumes a certain kind of subordinating order in Cooper’s work that I would like to examine more carefully. There are problems with the notion that the primary marriage plot succeeds in fundamentally changing the model of the American family. Though Mr. Wharton is ineffectual at best and repeatedly referred to as “imbecilic,” the landed Westchester aristocracy that he and his generation represents is not destroyed at the end
of the novel; rather, it moves south and re-establishes itself on the Virginia plantation where Peyton Dunwoodie brings his young wife Frances to live among slaves and carry on the same gentrified society that the novel begins with. Critics who see Cooper’s novel as a national allegory marking the transition from a colonial past to a modern capitalist nation tend to overlook the profound ambivalence of such an ending. Rather than constructing a narrative that disentangles America from its colonial heritage of a “landed aristocracy,” Cooper’s novel captures the complicated process of a nation in the act of absorbing and compromising itself over the class conflicts that have remained intact since the colonial era. Furthermore, Harvey Birch is less a marginalized or displaced figure than a forgotten one that Cooper’s narrative recalls and reasserts as the material democratic foundation that makes the present American union possible.

Robert S. Levine stresses the significance of “compromise” in Cooper’s national narrative, reflecting the present conflict of the Missouri debates and Compromise from 1819 to 1821, but again by focusing on the marriage plot as national allegory:

The novel builds to the marriage of a New York lady (Frances Wharton) and a Virginia gentleman (Peyton Dunwoodie). That marriage is linked both to the Revolutionary victory against the British and to the rise of the progressive U.S. nationalism that culminates in the “triumph” of the War of 1812; the novel’s final chapter depicts the crucial role played by the son of that marriage, Wharton Dunwoodie, in defeating the British. Though that child is presented as having bridged the divisions of the American Revolution, surely the 1821 publication context suggests that Cooper is addressing more recent divisions as well. (228)

Undoubtedly, Levine offers an important historical contextualization of Cooper’s narrative, but he suggests a relatively smooth version of national progress and resolution. Readings such as Samuels’s and Levine’s wind up—perhaps unintentionally—subordinating the function of Harvey Birch and other democratic figures in The Spy to a
master narrative that privileges an aristocratic version of the nation and reinforces the “great men” theory of national history that Cooper undercuts. Moreover, these subordinate the significance of memory and history within the work central to Cooper’s reinterpretation of the Revolution.

By repeatedly appearing at crucial moments in the narrative, saving lives, righting wrongs, and generally averting disasters for the “primary” characters, Harvey Birch, the anonymous and forgotten democratic hero, paradoxically resists the marginalization that Samuels describes. In fact, the novel revolves around the idea that Harvey Birch is misunderstood and misrepresented. Margaret Reid, like Samuels, sees Birch’s story as a “second narrative level” wherein Cooper sketches “the mythic story of the hidden origins of a new culture” (7). For Reid the plot involving the spy, like the shadowy forests surrounding the “Neutral Ground,” represents the ambiguities surrounding America’s cultural origins, which simply cannot be narrated through the inherited form of Old World romance. “The Spy is the living form of the new nation’s alternative story” (10), juxtaposed against the conventional romance plot of the aristocratic Wharton family. Reid marginalizes or sublimes Birch by characterizing him as a “ghostly” figure, a repressed other who looms around the margins of the nation. But, again, such a reading establishes oppositions rather than complications. Cooper’s seeks inclusion and remembrance through the national narrative, rather than exclusion and forgetting. Birch represents a hidden identity, but one that is at the center of national origins and democratic American culture.
Mis/representing the Nation

The true patriots in *The Spy* are often impossible to distinguish from the false ones, and the “neutral ground’ is neutral only in the sense of an indeterminate identity. Cooper stresses the anonymity of the common American and the unethical political abuse of patriotism through a motif of disguise and false identities. Speaking of the residents of the Neutral Ground, he writes:

Great numbers . . . wore masks, which even to this day have not been thrown aside; and many an individual has gone down to the tomb stigmatized as a foe to the rights of his countrymen, while in secret he has been the useful agent of the leaders of the revolution; and, on the other hand, could the hidden repositories of divers flaming patriots have been opened to the light of day, royal protections would have been discovered concealed under piles of British gold. (10)

In the novel’s opening scene a mysterious stranger, Mr. Harper, appears at the Whartons’ estate on the Neutral Ground and asks for lodging. Harper, later revealed to the reader as George Washington, causes great tension for the family by not divulging his political leanings. Meanwhile, young Henry Wharton arrives, also in the disguise of a traveling stranger, further increasing the atmosphere of ominous uncertainty that continues throughout the novel. Only Harvey Birch knows that Harper is really Washington and Henry is a British officer. Birch sees through the various masks of the Neutral Ground, but also uses them to his favor. He poses as a Yankee peddler, which most believe conceals his identity as a British spy. Only Washington shares the secret of Birch’s true identity as an American spy. Neutral-Ground disguises conceal private motives that not only cause identity confusion but also belie the more important issue of misrepresentation.
Cooper directly interrogates the boundary between memory and history as a rift separating lived experience from its textual representations and misrepresentations in history. Disguises expose Cooper’s anxieties about present misrepresentations that destabilize memory specifically because there are fewer and fewer members of the Revolutionary generation to remember and resist political misinterpretations of history. *The Spy* appears at “the poignant moment at which a people or group is forced, by the death of its members, to transfer an experience, existentially determinative of its own image of the nature of its existence as a historical entity, from the domain of memory to that of history” (White 78). For Hayden White this transfer implies a “politics of historical interpretation” that can never be dissociated from historical narrative. After the Wharton mansion has been burnt to the ground by Skinners, who, nominally at least, support the American cause, the heroic Virginian Captain Lawton states: “The time must arrive when America will learn to distinguish between a patriot and a robber” (277). *The Spy* directly questions which “determinative” experiences from the Revolution will be transferred from memory to history, and furthermore, complicates the “image” of Revolutionary history that has already been transferred. Even George Washington, the symbolic national father, misinterprets Birch’s true motives by offering Birch gold for his services after the war is over:

“Does your excellency think that I have exposed my life, and blasted my character, for money?”
“If not for money, what then?”
“What has brought your excellency into the field? For what do you daily and hourly expose your precious life to battle and the halter? What is there about me to mourn, when such men as you risk their all for our country? No—no—no—not a dollar of your gold will I touch; poor America has need of it all!” (398)
Birch ultimately rejects capitalist motives, a further suggestion that he does not so much represent a new and progressive economic order as he does the forgotten sacrifices of common Americans in the Revolution. In *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America*, Sarah J. Purcell discusses the evolution of public memory of the Revolution as a gradual process of democratization, one that culminates with the democratic ceremonies that accompanied Lafayette’s triumphal return to America in 1824-1825. Purcell points to the years following the War of 1812 as a “national crisis” brought on by the destabilization of public memory. After the war multiple versions of the Revolution appeared, particularly ones that focused on common soldiers, gradually transforming older images of the aristocratic officer-hero to ones of sacrifice and hardship endured by forgotten democratic masses. These new democratic images of the Revolution took the form of heroic suffering, as in the stories from winter at Valley Forge, but, like previous versions, the new ones also denied the political radicalism and violence of the Revolution.

Birch stands for the heroic and anonymous democratic masses, the same ones that Georg Lukács equates with the modern epic hero. He writes: “Through the plot, at whose center stands this hero, a neutral ground is sought and found upon which the extreme opposing social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another” (36). Lukács perfectly describes Birch’s narrative function in *The Spy*; he is a hub through which the spokes of the plot connect, and not simply in a literary sense. Birch draws together nearly all of the socially antagonistic elements of the narrative. Through disguises he crosses boundaries of race, class, and gender, and ultimately serves as a unifier between Washington as the national father and Cooper’s version of the people of
the new nation. Moreover, what appears to be an aesthetic flaw on Cooper’s part, the absence of a single strong plotline with a dominant hero figure, instead reflects the forgotten center of American culture, and therefore an unacknowledged genius in the novel’s organization.

Only one character understands the sacrifice that Birch makes for his country, his father, who dies while the family home is being robbed and pillaged by Skinners. Skinners were essentially lawless opportunists who roamed the Neutral Ground profiting and pillaging from the chaos of the Revolution. They supported the American cause, but were much closer to bounty hunters and profiteers than regular soldiers. Birch’s father’s death symbolically reenacts the loss of the Founding Fathers, the last generation to fully understand the sacrifice that people like Birch were making; furthermore, the Skinners’ actions become a commentary on the democratic abuses that occur when that sacrifice is forgotten:

> “While my father lived,” murmured Harvey, unable to smother his feelings, “there was one who read my heart; and oh! What a consolation to return from my secret marches of danger, and the insults and wrongs that I suffered, to receive his blessing, and his praise; but he is gone, . . . and who is there to do me justice.” (178)

There is no “justice” for Birch within his own lifetime because he is forgotten in the early republic. Without a memory of Revolutionary sacrifice, Americans become susceptible to democratic misrepresentations; thus, Cooper makes the Skinners and their profiteering cohorts the true villains of the novel. Skinners capture Birch hoping to cash in on a bounty by colluding with a corrupt land speculator—a figure who clearly resonates with social and economic problems of expansion in 1821. The speculator swindles Birch out of a fair price for his dead father’s home then turns him over to the Skinners. They
proceed to burn the house to the ground, reneging on their deal with the speculator.

When they bring Birch to the American Captain Lawton for a reward, his sarcasm is barely concealed. He tells the Skinner leader:

“You seem a most ingenious patriot. . . . Major Dunwoodie, I second the request of this worthy gentleman, and crave the office of bestowing the reward on him and his fellows. . . . Come, worthy children of America! . . . follow and receive your reward.” (198)

Lawton leads the Skinners to a barn where he has them tied up and whipped, but on the way they converse on the prospects of the war. The Skinner leader questions Washington’s abilities and Lawton, who continues to speak ironically, tells the Skinner that after the war

“your claims will be indisputable, while all these vile Tories who live at home peaceably, to take care of their farms, will be held in the contempt they merit. You have no farm, I suppose?”

“Not yet—but it will go hard if I do not find one before the peace is made.”

“Right; study your own interests, and you study the interests of your country; press the point of your own services, and rail at the Tories, and I’ll bet my spurs against a rusty nail that you get to be a county clerk at least.” (209-210)

Lawton’s comments articulate and reinforce the novel’s cautionary anxieties about failed memory leading to political misrepresentation. For Cooper, the true American enemy has always been the selfish and hypocritical profiteer. Furthermore, the rhetoric of all these statements suggests historical continuity. Lawton refers to the Skinners as “children of America,” repeatedly suggesting that these men will be the inheritors of the Revolutionary victory. The Skinners represent subsequent abuses of democracy and the general ingratitude shown towards many veterans immediately after the war was over.

Speaking of the general neglect that most Revolutionary veterans received after the war, the historian John Resch writes: “The country greeted them with indifference; it
quickly forgot them. Proud veterans felt betrayed.” (1). Resch argues that the Revolution initially was characterized as a “people’s war,” not a war fought by regular armies; thus, many veterans were denied recognition for the true sacrifices they had made in favor of a myth that Americans were “citizen soldiers.” After the war the new government rejected pensions for the many disabled veterans who lived in penury and resisted forming a standing army and navy, since they were associated with Old World corruption and the threat of monarchy. The myth of a united virtuous citizenry gradually changed as the Revolutionary generation became elderly, and public sentiment toward veterans changed as well. What Resch calls the image of the “suffering soldier” eventually replaced the old stories of America’s “sturdy yeomanry” and its “citizen soldiers.” Finally, in 1818 Congress passed the Revolutionary War Pension Act which awarded pensions to Continental Army veterans. It was followed by subsequent acts in the 1820s that awarded pensions to common militia veterans. “In passing the pension act, Congress codified the image of the suffering soldier in the political culture and public policy” (Resch 5). But this was accompanied by a reversal in opinions about the support that civilians gave to soldiers during and after the war. Places like Valley Forge became symbols of how “the patriot army had overcome civilian corruption and neglect to carry on the war against Britain” (Resch 72). Harvey Birch clearly recalls the image of the suffering soldier, but the Skinners also suggest “civilian corruption.” They explode the myth of a virtuous American citizenry, suggesting Cooper’s own ambivalence about popular democracy. Lawton’s final reference to local politics connects the Skinners’ unethical behavior to early republican politicians who drew attention to their military service to obtain political positions.35 Cooper, then, connects forgotten memories of

35 Shortly before writing The Spy Cooper had become quite involved in local politics, advocating for
democratic sacrifice to present political misrepresentation. The link between memory and history crucially maintains the political health of the republic. Just before ordering the Skinner’s whipping Lawton finally reveals himself to their leader by countering the former cynical statements: “But, thank God! There is a pervading spirit in the people that seems miraculous. Men who have nothing, act as if the wealth of the Indies depended on their fidelity; all are not villains like yourself, or we should have been the slaves to England years ago” (210). Birch is one these “men who have nothing,” and in a final irony that maintains his narrative function as hub of the plot and ultimately the facilitator of a politically just republic, he brings about the execution of the Skinner leader.

Both Lawton’s summary judgment and whipping of the Skinners and the subsequent brutal execution of their leader reflect the harsh justice of the Neutral Ground, but these acts also contrast with the formal trial of Henry Wharton by a Continental Army tribunal. Henry, like Harvey Birch, is unjustly sentenced to death. Charles Hansford Adams argues that these contrasting issues of justice and legality are at the core of not only The Spy, but all of Cooper’s early Revolutionary novels:

[H]is concern with the Revolution is a matter of identity—a self assessment—in several senses: it was at once a reflection of the national effort to define America, a determination to define his own identity as an American artist, and a distinctly personal quest for a clearer sense of himself.

The law, as one of the great touchstones of identity for both Cooper and his nation, serves as an appropriate medium to tie all these levels together. (28)

For Adams the absence of justice on the Neutral Ground that permits the lawlessness of the Skinners, the injustices to Harvey Birch and other characters, and the sham trial of the Jeffersonian democrats, though his father had been a Federalist. Cooper worked on the gubernatorial campaign of DeWitt Clinton and shortly thereafter became a strong supporter of Andrew Jackson’s run for the presidency in 1824.
innocent Henry Wharton dramatizes a confused legal identity for Americans that is still relevant in the 1820s. Since the law grants identity to individuals within its system, an “illegal” rebellion undermines that identity and requires a “lawgiver” to step in and recreate the authority of a new identity. In *The Spy* this lawgiver is George Washington who resolves the discrepancy between justice and law by supporting the legal authority of the judgment against Henry Wharton but also secretly ordering Harvey Birch to help Henry escape; thus, Adams sees Washington as the arbiter of legal and cultural authority in America. Russ Castronovo agrees with such an assertion: “only Washington can resolve ambiguous identities because his is unequivocally the identity of the true American father. And as national father, he judiciously exercises the authority to lead Cooper’s narrative to closure” (51). Both Adams and Castronovo view the novel’s resolution as a sort of top-down function with Washington as a *deus ex machina* figure establishing authority in the new republic. Yet, Washington’s arbitration only represents the “official” version of an American national narrative, that is, the traditional aristocratic image of Revolutionary history, while Harvey Birch’s actions literally determine the novel’s outcome. Birch’s role suggests a much more complicated story of national Revolutionary origins and narrative resolution.

**Cooper’s National Birth: Telling the Whole Story**

Birch and Washington are more than just follower and leader in *The Spy’s* plot; rather, in the end the two figures are conflated through a climactic, archetypal transformation scene that equates common Americans with their social superiors as legitimate authorizers of the new republic. Ironically, Frances Wharton becomes the only witness to the symbolic transformative birth of the nation, which occurs in a secret hut
that Harvey Birch has built around a cave’s mouth on a nearby mountain. Cooper literally places Frances in the space between the official history of the national birth, as represented by Washington, and the memory of democratic Revolutionary sacrifice that Birch represents. She symbolically embodies the rift between history and memory, a rift that Cooper attempts to mend by linking the two in his national narrative. Frances first notices the hut as she passes along a trail, intuitively associating it with Harvey Birch, but Cooper elevates the scene by foreshadowing the mountain’s transformative significance and Frances’ eventual recognition of Birch’s true identity:

At length a solitary gleam struck on the base of the mountain on which she was gazing, and moved gracefully up its side, until, reaching the summit, it stood for a minute, forming a crown of glory to the somber pile. So strong were the rays, that what was before indistinct now clearly opened to the view. With a feeling of awe at being thus unexpectedly admitted, as it were, into the secrets of that desert place, Frances gazed intently, until, among the scattered trees and fantastic rocks, something like a rude structure was seen. It was low, and so obscured by the colour of its materials, that but for its roof, and the glittering of a window, it must have escaped her notice. . . . After looking at it a moment in breathless wonder, Frances had just come to the conclusion that it was ideal, and that what she saw was a part of the rock itself, when the object moved swiftly from its position, and glided into the hut, at once removing every doubt as to the nature of either. (297)

After her brother Henry is sentenced to death by the Continental tribunal, Frances ascends to the hut in the hopes of finding Harvey Birch. She arrives just after dusk only to find the gentleman she knows as Harper seated at a table. She looks in the window, the one she had noticed earlier, and sees Harper/Washington poring over maps with an open Bible on the table beside him. The hut/cave (womb) marks a kind of prelapsarian space above the Neutral Ground where true identities can be revealed. It illustrates the secret world where the Revolution is planned, and signifies spiritual, providential origins for the Revolution instead of a rebellion by discontented masses. The window represents
Frances’ brief access to the secret world above the confused identities and injustices of the Neutral Ground. In the hut “British and American uniforms hung peaceably by the side of each other, and on the peg that supported a gown of striped calico, such as was the usual country wear, was also depending a well-powdered wig: in short, the attire was numerous, and as various as if a whole parish were to be equipped from this one wardrobe” (356). Harper/ Washington awaits news of whether Birch was able to help Henry Wharton escape, but Frances intervenes and disrupts that plan. Washington, who cannot let his relationship with Birch be known, swears Frances to secrecy and, just as Birch and Henry Wharton arrive, slips behind a curtain that conceals the “natural cavity” behind the hut. Shocked to find Frances, Birch asks how she got there:

Birch examined her features as, with open ingenuousness, she related the simple incidents that had made her mistress of his secret; and, as she ended, he sprang upon his feet, and, striking the window with the stick in his hand, demolished it at a blow. (360)

Birch’s world must remain secret while he lives, and thus he recognizes that the window’s symbolic and literal transparency cannot continue. Frances, as “the mistress of his secret” is given access to the nation’s secret origins. She becomes a third figure who not only understands the true nature of the relationship between Washington and Birch, but also negotiates the liminal space between the national father and the anonymous democratic masses. Frances is the sole witness of a symbolic national birth ritual that occurs when Birch slips into the cave where Washington is hidden at the narrative’s climactic moment. Both Birch and Washington emerge (first Birch secretly, and then Washington in full uniform), and thereafter the two direct resolutions to the various plot complications.
It is worth noting that although he has no knowledge of Washington or the role that the American commander plays in his escape, Henry Wharton, as a strict Loyalist, complicates Cooper’s myth of national origins by being present (though unaware of it) at the symbolic birth. Henry also connects to Birch in ways that significantly complicate a national allegory. If the Whartons represent America as a divided family with Frances as the patriot advocate and Henry as the Loyalist one, then Birch not only helps to mend their political differences, but also enables a relationship after the war. The novel begins with Henry foolishly refusing to follow Harvey Birch’s advice, resulting in his capture at the family home. And even after Birch helps him escape, Henry still resists direction during the ascent to the hut, but once there Frances convinces Henry to submit to Birch’s direction. Henry says, “I have not known you, dear girl, it is true; but now, as I learn your value, can I quit you here? Never, never!” But Frances insists, and immediately after leaving the hut Henry “determine[s] to submit to Harvey’s government,” and further, “follow[s] in blind submission to his will . . . like a child in leading-strings” (374-375). When Birch re-emerges from the cave, he escorts Henry onto a British ship that lies by the mouth of the Hudson, and Henry returns to England where he eventually becomes a general in the British army.

Birch, the unacknowledged and forgotten democratic memory of the Revolution, facilitates the escape of a British soldier and at another point in the novel prevents Frances and Henry’s sister, Sarah Wharton, from marrying the villainous British Colonel Wellmere, by exposing Wellmere as a bigamist. Thus, within Cooper’s national allegory Birch functions as a kind of cultural mediator who both prevents British colonial exploitation (through Wellmere) and also negotiates a successful resolution of the
political differences between patriots (Frances) and loyalists (Henry). The fact that Birch’s services have been forgotten reinforces the discrepancy between the “official” narrative of the Revolution as a decisive military victory against professional British soldiers and the more complicated story of internal American political differences and neutral parties that made distinctions between enemy and friend—self and other—almost impossible.

When Harper emerges from the cave, after Birch and Henry Wharton have gone, he is dressed in the full uniform of the Continental army commander, though he does not assume the identity of national father until he descends to the Neutral Ground below with Frances. As they reach the plain Harper says:

“God has denied to me children, young lady; but if it had been his blessed will that my marriage should not have been childless, such a treasure as yourself would I have asked from his mercy. But you are my child: all who dwell in this broad land are my children, and my care . . .” (362)

Cooper of course uses the familiar trope of Washington as the symbolic father of the nation, but Frances also transforms on the mountain, sloughing off her old identity as the spirited child of an ineffectual Tory father to become the daughter of her true father, George Washington. Northrop Frye specifically identifies the significance of ascent in romance narratives: “Ascent themes introduce . . . the growing of identity through the casting off of whatever conceals or frustrates it” (140). For Frances who has throughout the novel struggled against the Tory sympathies of her sister, father, and brother, the journey to the mountain marks the external resolution of her divided loyalties; she descends from the mountain as an official daughter of America ready to

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36 Cooper’s novel has numerous and extensive parallels with Frye’s theories on ascent themes, but the most significant have to do with the emergence of national identity out of the chaos of Revolution. Ascent themes nearly always involve plots of “escape through a shift of identity,” (136), and often deal with social questions of justice versus law.
marry its official son, Peyton Dunwoodie. Yet, in the unofficial version Frances contains the ambivalent origins of the nation; she is the “mistress” of America’s secret identity.

Frances, then, is not just the symbolic daughter of a national father, she becomes a liminal figure: aristocratic daughter and democratic mistress, official history and secret memory, patriot wife yet loyal sister. A kind of consummation occurs in the hut, one that forever must be kept secret from her future husband. Cooper’s mythical origins of the nation precede the formal aristocratic marriage that takes place between New York and Virginia, suggesting far more ambivalence about the union between North and South, a “Union” that is already “compromised” as Cooper writes *The Spy*. The secret knowledge that passes between Birch and Frances represents an earlier relationship between an American nation and her common people. Harvey Birch may be formally forgotten in the legal marriage between New York and Virginia, but his actions undergird the union and make it possible.

The oft-criticized final chapter functions as an epilogue to the narrative. It skips ahead thirty-three years to the War of 1812 and has Frances and Peyton’s son Wharton Dunwoodie meet Harvey Birch. In a review of *The Spy* in the *Port Folio* Sarah Hale calls the ending “a lame and impotent conclusion” (95), but seen in the light of the transformative episode in the mountain hut, the final encounter lends greater relevance and ambiguity to Cooper’s allegory of the nation’s birth. Wharton Dunwoodie is a first-generation American born of the marital union between New York and Virginia, but his mother has also been a “mistress” of Harvey Birch’s secret heroism, the pre-marital

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37 It is somewhat puzzling that Margaret Reid does not examine the crucial mountain scene in *Cultural Secrets*. Instead she focuses on the Wharton estate, “The Locusts,” as the spatial center of the narrative, and its razing by Skinners as the climactic scene in the novel, though she acknowledges that it is destroyed with a “third of the novel left to go,” (9).
relationship that made a legal Union possible. When they meet beside Niagara Falls, Wharton says to Birch, whom he obviously does not know,” Perhaps you have a son among the soldiers,” but Birch replies, “No; I am alone in the world!” (402). Birch has been forgotten and the memory of his Revolutionary service has died with Frances Wharton. Yet the last act of the novel preserves the forgotten legacy, not through living memory, but through historical documentation. When Wharton Dunwoodie discovers Birch’s body on the Chippewa Plains he finds a letter from Washington characterizing Birch’s Revolutionary service. The letter preserves the possibility of maintaining Birch’s Revolutionary legacy. The previously unknown document literally enacts the transition from a living memory preserved by Frances to a written history preserved in the note from Washington. Within the allegory Frances represents the living national memory of America’s Revolutionary generation, but that memory dies with her; nonetheless the hope for the second generation lies in the discovery of a written record, one that reveals the “faithful and unrequited” service that made the Revolution successful (406). The final lines of The Spy interweave official and unofficial, using Washington’s cultural authority to reaffirm the forgotten history of democratic Revolutionary sacrifice and marking Cooper’s own generation--who straddle the boundary between memory and history—as the re-interpreters of a national identity.

**John Neal and “the Politics of Historical Interpretation”**

In The Spy Cooper acknowledges other forgotten versions of the Revolution, but these add to rather than displace the official myth of Washington as heroic father or the histories that depict the Revolution as a contest between aristocratic gentlemen. That is, Cooper resists a counter-narrative that invariably would subvert and radicalize history; he
compromises, just as divided American politicians had with the Missouri debates, and therefore implicitly consents to the ongoing national project of absorbing the unresolved colonial inequities left by the Revolutionary generation. But John Neal’s novel *Seventy-Six* (1823) stands in sharp contrast to Cooper’s compromise between memory and history. In *Seventy-Six* Neal radicalizes history by openly contesting the validity of Enlightenment influenced, coldly rational versions of the Revolution. Furthermore, Neal democratizes history by asserting a first-person account against official authoritative third-person histories. In nearly every aspect of the narrative Neal resists the typical representations of nationalist ideology, calling attention to what he sees as present political failures of misrepresentation in the new republic. Neal clearly reacts against the growing internal threat of American imperialism embedded in the rhetoric of federal, or State-authorized, nationalism by re-inscribing nationalism as a specific, local, experiential expression of American identity, rather than a broadly ideological representative one. For example, the subtitle of *Seventy-Six* is “Our Country!—Right or Wrong,” but the subsequent narrative Neal constructs undermines the relationship between the federal government and the people so that assumptions about “our country” sound more like assertions against the State than professions of national unity. Specifically, Neal begins by juxtaposing his narrative of the Revolution against other histories. The first-person narrator, Jonathan Oadley, now a decrepit old man, typifies Neal’s objective in reinterpreting and retelling the Revolutionary story:

> We have had many a history of our country, many of the revolution; but none written by men acquainted by participation therein, with our sorrow, and trial, and suffering: not one, where the mighty outline of truth is distinctly visible—no, not one. I make no exception. All of them are in my mind, at this moment—there is not one. . . . There is a vividness in my recollection that cannot deceive me. I know personally, and intimately,
the leading men in this drama. Most of them have gone down to their graves, dishonoured and trampled upon, in their old age:—many are yet wandering, helpless and dejected, among the beautiful and vast proportion of that edifice, which they built up with their blood and bones—like the spirits of venerable men, that have been driven away from their dwelling places by banditti—and died in a foreign land . . . . yet, at my bidding they will appear! and . . . stand before you, as I have seen them stand before GEORGE WASHINGTON—a battalion of immoveable, impregnable, unconquerable old men.

I am familiar with all that they thought and did, . . . from the time that I went among them a passionate, wild boy, till I came out from them, battered and worn, and bruised and broken and scarred all over, with the deep cabala of premature old age.

None but an eyewitness can tell, as it ought to be told, the story of individual suffering . . . (1: 14-15)

Though he was born after the war, Neal certainly knew something of Revolutionary history. In 1819 he wrote most of Paul Allen’s *History of the American Revolution*, but it is clear that he was dissatisfied with “official” histories of the Revolution. Jonathan refers to them as “blundering, tedious, compilations” (1:16), and goes further by explaining how he writes against these other histories:

Yes—though I would tell the tale before I die—old as I am, frail as the tenure is, by which I hold to the earth, I must take my own time for it, and tell that which I do tell, with the plainness and honesty of my nature, so that you may depend upon it. You know that I will tell you nothing which I do not know to be true. I need not add, therefore, that, where there is a disagreement between my story, and that which you will find in the blundering, tedious compilations, which are called the Histories of our Revolution, you will do well to rely upon mine. (1: 15-16)

Memory, then, is opposed to history in Neal’s narrative, which creates a kind of subversive political interpretation of the Revolution that displaces official history by authorizing lived experience and memory. But this raises a number of ironies that expose Neal’s own political position. As Michael Kammen documents, by 1820 a great many of the key figures of the Revolution had already passed away and those who remained no longer had a clear memory of events. John Adams even believed that “the true history of
the American revolution & of the establishment of our present Constitutions [are] as lost forever” (qtd. in Kammen 19). And Neal himself of course relies upon the very histories that he condemns in order to construct the narrative. In essence, Neal reacts against what Hayden White explains as “the politically domesticating effects of a historical attitude that is always much too prone to equate the consignment of an event to history with the end of a war” (*Content* 79). Neal hopes to capture the bloody and terrifying realities of the Revolution as a means of awakening his readers from the lethargy of objective histories. White contends that “official” history always emanates from centers of established political power and social authority and that this kind of tolerance [that is, the kind of historical instruction that places war safely in the past] is a luxury only devotees of dominant groups can afford. For subordinate, emergent, or resisting social groups, this recommendation—that they view history with the kind of “objectivity,” “modesty,” “realism,” and “social responsibility” that has characterized historical studies since their establishment as a professional discipline—can only appear as another aspect of the ideology they are indentured to oppose. (*Content* 81)

Neal appropriates memories of the Revolution as a structure for the narrative. He tropes the image of the “suffering soldier” found in popular genres of Revolutionary memoirs, eyewitness accounts, tales, and legends and therefore destabilizes the authority of objective history. In its first-person subjective form, memory resists totalizing generalization and misrepresentation. It also responds to present American anxieties about the Revolutionary successors and how they will represent the nation. Jonathan Oadley writes:

> There are few men upon this earth, in whom it would not be presumption to alter what I have written. And you, my children, are *not* of their number. In you it would be wicked and foolish. . . . No—let there be no interpolation. My blessing shall not abide upon him that dares to add, alter, or leave out, one jot or tittle of the whole. No—let it go down, with your blood, the patent of your nobility, to the elder son, forever and
ever; and when you are able, multiply the copies among all that are descended from me, as the last legacy, of one, that it would be an honour to them, whatever they become, to be the posterity of. (1:16-17)

The preoccupation with written preservation is stronger in Neal even than with Cooper; it becomes a central component of the narrative frame. Oadley tells his children that he will write his account in packets designed to be read around the family fireside in winters, but not as entertainment; rather, he connects the act of reading to a religious ritual that will “call up his apparition before you . . . instantly, in the deepest and dimmest solitude of your memory!” (1:2). Oadley’s ritualized readings displace federalized versions of nationalism, invoking the local authority of the family hearth not as parallel to State authority but in opposition to it. There is a radical anti-social, even anti-modern nationalist quality to Oadley’s invocation that represents a deep mistrust of larger social units like government or religions. He requests that the packets be read while the family is alone: “if you are wise, you will preserve some hidden fountains of your heart, unvisited but by one or two. This should be one of them” (1:16). In effect, then, part of reading the packets involves preserving the sanctity of the family unit against “intrusion” and “profanation.” Herein lies Neal’s radicalism: Seventy-Six reacts against the misuse or misappropriation of history for the ideological purposes of a federalized nationalism. Neal asserts an alternative version of Revolutionary history, one that stresses individual memory and experience over a generic approach, and this corresponds with fears that the new nation was becoming an empire rather than a true republic.

There is only one passage in all of Seventy-Six where Jonathan breaks from his meditation on the Revolution. In a strange aside, he interpolates the story of a meeting with Aaron Burr twenty years after the war. Burr tries to recruit them to join in his
plotted coup of the American government. He argues that the US has become too large and the original thirteen states are now “a spot only in our empire.” Jonathan says of Burr: “since the time of the Romans, there has never been a man upon this earth so like Julius Caesar” (2: 72). In *Writing and Postcolonialism in the Early Republic* Edward Watts examines the very distinction between empire and republic that Burr utilizes. Watts refers to Patrick Henry’s 1788 speech at the Virginia ratifying convention for the new proposed federal Constitution. Henry opposed the new Constitution on the grounds that it affirmed a federal “empire.” Watts writes, “In the constitutional ‘empire’ he [Henry] fears, the gains of the Revolution will be lost and citizens reverted to mere subjects. . . . The republicans, in modern terms, were attempting to reintroduce a stratified social order in which the ‘middling and lower classes of people’ (124) will be reconverted to pre-Revolutionary subjects and the nation will become an empire that, like all such entities, will operate under the rubric of the word’s etiological origins: *imperium*—by command” (2).38

Like a satanic tempter, Burr almost succeeds in convincing Jonathan and his friend Chester Copely that “dismemberment” of the Union is necessary, but even more rhetorically devious is Burr’s argument that governing power is in the hands of “the people” rather than Congress, a distinction of representation that Neal himself exploits: “before Aaron Burr had done, we were ready—or at least I was—to draw my sword for him. Gracious heaven! What attitude and dominion are given to eloquence! He first remarked that we were already too large;--and, after some argument, we assented to it” (2: 73). Neal uses the incident with Burr to highlight the rhetorical corruption and political demagoguery that pervert the original system of American governance. He

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recognizes the inherent ambiguity in a term like “the people,” an ambiguity that can be manipulated to serve the rhetorical needs of any political position. Thus, Burr’s talk of dismembering the Union parallels both sides of the contemporary slavery debate: it appeals both to southern states who would secede and New England states who sought to separate the original Union from the West and thereby maintain control over US policy. Though seduced by Burr’s eloquence, Jonathan, with the help of his friend Chester Copely, resists. Copely concludes: “You are a traitor, Burr; and he that listens to you, will be—must be, a traitor; nay, is, if he do not silence you.” (2: 75).

By implying that Congress does not represent the “people” of America Burr reinforces Neal’s thematic strategy of preserving the immediacy of remembered experience within the individual family as a way of avoiding national historical misrepresentation. Jonathan repeatedly asks that his account be preserved as a “family relick,” and that there be “no alteration in it—no corrections” (1:16). Unlike Cooper, Neal shows little faith in the present generation, or, for that matter, in history as progress. Oadley states:

Men do not talk now as they used to—you see none of the old fashioned kingly-looking people in this generation . . . their thought, the currency of their heart is base and degenerate—it wears no longer the stamp of sovereignty—is no longer the coinage of God’s kingdom—but the paltry counterfeit thereof—base and showy. No—trust them not. Hold what there is left to you, of other days, as the regalia of giants . . . . Ye are a fettered people—fettered too, by manacles that would have fallen from the limbs of your fathers like rain . . . (1:16)

Cooper sought to explain the present by revealing a forgotten aspect of its past; Neal makes a subversive commentary on the present by placing it in light of a heroic past.

David S. Reynolds rightly calls Neal one of the innovators of “subversive literature” in America but focuses primarily on “Neal’s crucial role in developing a native
Subversive idiom” (199). Clearly, Neal sought a style that resisted the influence of smooth Addisonian prose. Oadley writes: “My style may often offend you. I do not doubt that it will. I hope that it will. It will be remembered the better. It will be the style of a soldier, plain and direct, where facts are to be narrated; of a man roused and inflamed, when the nature of man is outraged--. . . as the tale is of one, or of the other” (1: 17). The “native Subversive idiom” that Reynolds points out marks an important intersection between literature and culture in Neal’s work, one that he was quite conscious of. Speaking of The Spy Neal writes:

[i]f it be not a real North American story, . . . it is very like one; if not exactly that for which we have been longing, it is the shadow, and perhaps the forerunner of it. And, although Mr. Cooper has not given us a single page of what is purely and absolutely American—a single phrase, we might say, in all that he has ever written; or a single touch, either of language, or thought, or character, which is absolutely true . . . . his materials are American; the groundwork, at least; and a part of the outside is truth, great historical truth. (American Writers 207)

What makes Neal’s style “subversive” is its double resistance: on one hand it openly rejects Old World models, on another it opposes American imitators, that is, those who would absorb the colonial heritage. Neal seeks a complete literary decolonization, and argues that the modern nationalism in works like Cooper’s seeks a compromise with the past. Neal’s anxiety over stylistic issues reflects the growing cultural hegemony of modern nationalism; the Revolution, then, becomes an important metaphorical vehicle for

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39 Neal claims to have produced four novels in just twenty-seven days in the winter of 1821. The four novels were, in order of composition, Logan, Randolph, Errata, and finally, Seventy-Six. Seventy-Six is technically the only historical novel of the four. Though Logan primarily takes place in pre-Revolutionary America, its historicity is secondary to what might best be characterized as a gothic vision of America’s confused national origins. Neal himself refers to Logan as “a piece of declamation” in American Writers (167). Randolph and Errata were published after Logan (1822) and Seventy-Six (1823), and both are set in contemporary America, which seems to have been a conscious transition for Neal—though he did return to the historical novel by 1825 with Brother Jonathan and 1828 with Rachel Dyer. In Randolph Neal writes of American novelists, “he who shall first dare to grapple with the present, will triumph, in this country. Remember, my prediction” (AW 236).
resistance to the Old World. Neal calls Cooper “a dwarf . . . prattling” about the Revolution, while its heroes are “like giants” (AW 207-208). Seventy-Six becomes a model for reasserting a popular democratic resistance to misrepresentation, much like the original American revolutionaries, and in particular, Neal sees the novel as the primary form for such resistance.

Neal recognizes the profound influence that the novel form exerts in American society. In Randolph he writes:

There is no class of literature, which may be made to have; nay which has, in reality, such an influence—upon society;--and, if a man, who had the strength and vividness, of a dramatist, and a poet, were called upon to reflect and to choose, that mode of writing, which would be most likely, if he were truly powerful, to give him the widest theatre for a display of that power, it is my deliberate opinion that he would choose a novel; (AW 235)

In Seventy-Six Neal is equally direct:

The influence [of the novel] . . . is greater than that of all other literature. People read novels, who never go to play [sic] or to church. People read novels, who never read plays, sermons, history, philosophy, nor indeed any thing else: And people read novels secretly, in all weathers, from morning till night—who do nothing else. How material then is it, that their power should be understood; (2: 229)

Neal recognizes the political power of an “imagined community” of novel readers, but he also recognizes that such power does not mobilize that “community” as a whole. Instead, Neal tries to develop individual resistance to mass political culture by advocating reverence for America’s heroic Revolutionary past, as if to circumvent present efforts that galvanize America through false ideologies that distort historical reality. In an era of increasingly intense debate over federal consolidation and issues of political representation among the various geographic sections in America Neal reverts to the artistic expression of individually lived experience as an alternative “nationalism.”
Jonathan and Archibald: the Revolution as Metaphor for Present and Past

Through the Oadley brothers, Jonathan and Archibald, Neal subverts dominant Enlightenment theories of history as progress and rather illustrates the growing division between an enfeebled present and a heroic past. Unlike Cooper who memorializes the spy’s service to his country, Neal brings that forgotten voice to life in the present. He deliberately reopens old wounds and writes against a contemporary culture that sought to sanitize the violence of the Revolution through images of commemoration. Jonathan writes:

Look at the men of our revolution; where do you find such faces now? Why are not their children’s written over, and sculpted as deeply? Why! Because the impress of relationship—the hand of nature, never yet operated upon the countenance of man, and never will, with aught of that terrible distinctness, with which political convulsion chisels out the head and the face of her chosen ones. Look at the men of our revolution—their very countenances are the history of the time. (1: 247-248)

Jonathan, whose name recalls the “Brother Jonathan” of national iconography, is the voice of America’s present, while Archibald epitomizes the heroism of the Revolution itself. But because he lives in the present, Jonathan also becomes the vehicle for Neal’s troping of popular “federalized” national iconography. He is a living sculpture—to use one of Neal’s most common metaphors—in an era that sought fixed memorials to the Revolutionary past. Jonathan still suffers, and therefore the Revolution still intrudes upon the present.

In an era bent on stressing national unity Neal takes pains to differentiate and distinguish representations of Revolutionary service. From the outset Jonathan presents himself as a common American, part of the mythical yeomanry of Revolutionary lore, but Neal makes it clear that these individuals, not the American gentry, were the backbone of
military forces during the war. The action of the Revolution begins when Hessian troops raze the Oadley home, and Jonathan and Archibald recruit a militia force from the neighboring farms. Jonathan states, “I thought that I had never seen so handsome a troop of yeomanry” (1: 37). This contrasts with the story that their commander Colonel Clinton tells of wealthy volunteers who repeatedly abandon the cause. He says that Washington “is tired and sick of your volunteering—your rabble gentry—coming and going when they please—there’s the damned Connecticut light horsemen—they have just gone home, in a body—the scampering rascals!—because he put them on a duty at night . . .” (1: 58). When Howe offers to pardon the rebels in 1776, Jonathan says that the only ones to accept the offer were “the dastardly gentry (for the poor held out—in their nakedness and poverty, to their last breath)” (1: 32).

By having Jonathan identify with the American yeomanry, rather than the Continental army, and with poor, rather than wealthy volunteers, Neal destabilizes the mythology of the citizen soldier, specifically introducing issues of class struggle. He revitalizes the early republic’s myth that the Revolution was a people’s war fought by a unified citizenry only to subvert its hegemonic properties. Instead of telling a story that controls the threat of democratic unrest after the Revolution (for example, the Whiskey Rebellion), Neal reasserts class divisions in Revolutionary representations, and further, argues that they result from the gap between Congress and the “people.” Jonathan repeatedly targets political failures by Congress as the primary cause for suffering among the soldiers and for prolonging the war. The horrible privations at Valley Forge are attributed “to the mismanagement of Congress—always interfering, whenever it was possible to make mischief.” (2: 67)
Jonathan blames Congress for at first undermining Washington’s authority and then making the “unwise” decision of naming him supreme commander:

They were wrong. They deserved to be tumbled from their seats for it. At first, they were so niggardly and dastardly in their grants—so bountiful in their limitations, and restrictions . . . that he was little else, than a nominal commander, incapable of exercising any discretion, but at the peril of a court martial. And now they put into his hands—the sword—and the purse—and the law—at one, and the same moment. They betrayed their trust. They behaved unwisely—and though it gave to George Washington’s virtue the last trial—the trial of fire—yet the men that put him to the proof, deserved to be trampled to the earth—bound hand and foot and driven by the iron chariot of despotism. It was no virtue of theirs—no want of power, or opportunity in Washington—nothing but his own sublime and heroick disdain of crowns and sceptres . . .—nothing but that—which prevented him, from being a king in the land—backed by the whole power of Great Britain . . . (1: 249)

Jonathan gives voice to a sorrowful remembrance, in a sense the only legacy that remains from the Revolution. His account may be a familial legacy, a sacred family “relick” religiously remembered by later generations, but even so, without their own memories, the next generation cannot truly value the meaning of the Revolution.

Jonathan’s despair and grief capture the genuine anxiety in America in the early 1820s over whether the memories of the Revolution could yet be preserved. Moreover, Neal employs the technique of writing in the moment to increase the vividness of such anxieties. All that contemporary America has left from the Revolutionary era is Jonathan, a crippled shadow of the man who was once “probably the stoutest fellow of my age in the whole country” (1: 23). *Seventy-Six* subverts popular assumptions about historical progress, but not, I argue, as a cynical end in itself. That is, Neal does not see contemporary America in terms of an irreparable decline from its golden age, and

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40 See Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: U of Penn Press, 2002) for a full discussion of how the Revolution was preserved in “public memory” and the particular anxieties in America as the last of the Revolutionary generation died off in the 1820s.
Seventy-Six as a lament for that bygone era; rather, the text undermines the hegemony of federal nationalism in America by deliberately disconcerting readers. As an elderly man on the verge of death, Jonathan symbolizes America’s present transitional status. By contrast, Neal allegorically reenacts the Revolution through Jonathan’s brother Archibald.41

At the novel’s outset Archibald is “a poor weakly creature” (1: 23) that his father designates for the ministry, but with the outbreak of war, “his very nature” changes (1: 87). Consistent with the social changes accompanying the Revolution, all the rules of primogeniture and social structure are thrown aside, and Jonathan though the older of the

41 Though Archibald is certainly a Byronic hero, Seventy-Six does not engage in the sort of hero worship that often characterizes Romanticism, primarily because Neal recognizes that the Revolution itself transformed the age, not its individual participants. Neal revered Byron, and in 1817 wrote a long review of Byron’s poetry that appeared over several issues of the Portico magazine, a Baltimore literary journal produced by the Delphian club of which Neal was a member.

Archibald, Jonathan, and all those who go through the war are heroes shaped by the times that they lived in. The actual hero of Seventy-Six, then, is the Revolution, but Archibald tells its story. Lukács argues that this fundamentally distinguishes writers of “the heroic ideals of the Enlightenment and [French] Revolution” (81) from the Romantics’ “decorative modernization . . . subjectivization and moralization of history” (77). Lukács’ view is of particular interest because it historically situates Neal on the transitional cusp of American Romanticism. But Neal is not a Romantic, at least by Lukács’ definition, for several significant reasons that directly articulate the complicated function of history and heroism in Seventy-Six. First, Neal makes it clear that his experimental prose style, though often characterized by later critics as Romantic, captures the real language of a “plain soldier” from the Revolutionary era, what Lukács calls “the faithful portrayal of the popular conditions and popular movements . . . the actual, specific, real poetry of historical life” (77). For Neal, the plain style is quite distinct from the careful, smooth prose of his day, and he has Jonathan deliberately contrast the two: “I don’t know that you will understand me, my children, but I have been endeavoring to be very fine—after the fashion of the day” (1: 169). This discussion of style parallels Lukács’ characterization of Romanticism as “decorative” history. For Neal, and Lukács, style affects the ability to present an “unbiased exploration of the real life of the past” (77) and leads to “moralizing subjectivism.” (79). This must be distinguished from Neal’s anti-modern nationalist theory of history as the legacy of individual family units, though the line is a fine one and further marks the transitional nature of Neal’s writing. Jonathan’s subjective account of the Revolution never once suggests that the truth of the war cannot be objectively portrayed. On the contrary, Neal fully believes in specific empirical objectivity and adamantly resists subjective interpretation, the kind that leads to overt moralizing and misrepresentation of history. Jonathan’s plain style and the metonymic hero Archibald Oadley both reflect Neal’s goal of creating an alternative form of historical representation, one that actually resists the kind of Romantic hero-worshipping historicism that characterizes Bancroft’s writing a decade later.
two, subordinates himself to Archibald who becomes the Revolutionary spirit of his countrymen. Even Washington falls under Archibald’s sway:

. . . Washington pressed his white charger forward at least twenty yards abreast of my brother . . . as if carried away, for a moment, with enthusiasm—and well he might have been, for my brother’s eyes shone intensely bright . . . For my own part, I forgot his age, and moved after him as if I had been the junior—but so it has been through my life; that boy, after the first twenty years of his course, during which I had passed by him, regardless of his eye or attitude, took his position all at once, and was never afterwards driven from it. I tried, again and again—to recover my ancient sway—that was in vain—my equality next—that was equally so—till at last, wearied out with a perpetual warfare against a spirit that always would keep in advance . . . I silently abandoned myself to his steady dominion: acknowledged his supremacy, and slept quietly ever afterward. (1: 154-155)

But Neal is not content to idealize the Revolution; instead, what begins as a seemingly virtuous and heroic uprising gradually undermines itself. Neal depicts the bloody horrors of Revolutionary violence in great detail:

When I came to my recollection, I was smeared all over with the blood and brains of a poor fellow, upon whom I had fallen. I arose and attempted to stand—there were at least thirty or forty human beings about me, dead and dying—the snow all stained and trodden—here a wounded horse snorting and pawing—and sweeping his blood red mane all over the snow, and shuddering so, as to throw the blood from it like spattering rain . . . (1: 99)

Slowly the horrors of war destabilize the Revolution’s heroic or spiritual dimensions, and in the second volume Archibald begins a steady, but mysterious, decline in health. He begins to be haunted by the ghosts of men he has slain: “Every thing that I touch feels of blood—Every thing that I see, or smell—looks and smells of blood, detestable hot blood—foaming and smoking from the ground” (2: 18). The ideal Revolutionary spirit is concretized by the horrors of battle; then becomes haunted by its Other, the spirit of war. Archibald tells Jonathan, “I am weary of the trade of blood—it wears me to death. . . .
Brother, I am not very sure—not so sure, as I have been, that this war is a righteous one” (2: 16).

Ultimately, the myth of the Revolution as a war fought by “giants” from a golden age unravels, consumed by ambivalence, as Archibald becomes a guilt-ridden shell of his former self. Neal literally divides the novel in two halves (its two volumes): the first half builds Archibald’s heroic stature and the second half completely undermines it. Neal ends the first volume—the novel’s climactic center—with a duel between Archibald and his superior Colonel Clinton over a woman, Lucia Arnauld’s, honor. Thus Neal places a personal contest, rather than a patriotic cause, at the narrative center of his work, and the white space between the volumes literally reproduces the rift between the Revolution as a noble cause and its material reality as a bloody rebellion. Out of the yawning rift between the two emerges the most significant trope of all: America as “ruined” woman.

**America as Dishonored Woman**

Archibald’s first act in the Revolution is to kill the Hessian who raped his mother and bring back to his father her red handkerchief. Mr. Oadley, now sixty years old, states: “This night’s work was a judgment upon me. I shall return no more to my home—it is dishonoured. . . . Before I sleep I shall buckle a sword upon my thigh—one that has been fleshed already, to the hilt—to the hilt, Jonathan—and never will I let go of it, till my heart is shattered—my Country free—my wife avenged” (1: 58-59). Neal condenses and conflates latent sexual violence with the origins of Revolutionary violence, suggesting that the “brutal profanation of our mothers, wives, and daughters, before our faces” mustered America:

Men of America!—will ye ever forget it?—if ye do, may your beautiful daughters and wives—no—that were too awful a malediction—may ye
and they, perish, strangled in each other’s arms, suffocated in each other’s blood!—these things at last drove us mad. We arose, as one people—a nation, about to offer up its enemies in sacrifice; (1: 66-67)

Revolution derives from madness, not rational objections to unequal taxation or political representation, but the source of the nation, and ultimately its preservation, depends upon the sacred act of remembering, hence Jonathan’s repeated admonitions to his children that they faithfully preserve his writings and ritualize the act of reading them. Religious ritualizing contains any threat of future democratic violence and also preserves an uncorrupted memory. Jonathan calls upon Americans to remember because memories of sexual violence galvanize Americans into “one people.” The act of remembering transforms simple vengeance into a sacred ritual (In fifteen years the same act will occur in the Texas Revolution: “Remember the Alamo!”). Vengeance becomes ritual, which Jonathan then translates into a historical record of the Revolution and birth of the nation.

The process recalls Ernest Renan’s definition of a nation “as a rich legacy of remembrances . . . which all hold in common” (17), and seemingly contradicts Homi Bhabha’s assertion that Renan’s national will to remember also forgets “the history of violence involved in establishing the nation’s writ” (“DissemiNation” 310). But part of Neal’s subversive nationalism implies the will to remember violent origins. Nevertheless, the fact that these origins are associated with sexual violence against women involves the common trope of the nation as a female subject, and this deserves further questioning.

Sexual violence against American women interrupts the family romance and initiates military violence. In Romances of the Republic Shirley Samuels explains the figurative shift from political conflict to sexual violation: “Between seduction and
violence, or incorporating violence as seduction, the image of the simultaneously alluring and devouring female centers cultural figurations of national conflict” (5-6). Samuels’s observation holds true throughout *Seventy-Six*. Violence and seduction are at the core of every conflict in the narrative, thus figuring “the female body . . . as a shifter term in this merging of colonizer and colonized, victor and victims” (3). In every sense, Neal’s narrative literally incarnates the ambivalent, paradoxical space between Samuels’s terms through representations of seduced and violated women as the source of national origins. As Elleke Boehmer notes: “national difference, like other forms of difference, is constituted through the medium of the sexual binary, using the figure of the woman as a primary vehicle” (5). Neal uses female bodies to illustrate present issues of national misrepresentation. He genders, or “engenders,” the nation as woman and enacts narrative conflicts over how women are represented, that is, honorably or dishonorably. Such conflicts also articulate difference between a single authoritative master narrative and individual local or sectional representations that complicate and sometimes contradict the official nationalist version.

The Oadley brothers love the Arnauld sisters, but Neal interweaves three other romances with these two primary ones, and in this way he enacts the sectional conflicts that complicate any single version of the Revolution. Arthur Rodman, like his Oadley cousins, is from the middle colony of New Jersey, an area that was particularly ravaged by the war. When the Oadley farm is burned by Hessians at the outset of the narrative, Rodman’s true love, Mary Austin, is trapped in the home and burns to death rather than submit to rape. She becomes a symbolic figure, a rallying point for the local yeomanry to
join the cause. Arthur throws himself into battle for the rest of the first volume until this subplot is miraculously reversed in the second half of the novel, when Jonathan finds Mary living with family friends in Philadelphia. Neal’s seemingly absurd plot contrivance corresponds with the amazing reversal of military fortune in New Jersey. After a series of initial defeats, Washington’s forces staged a number of surprise attacks upon the British and Hessians that changed the course of events in the colony.

A second romantic subplot involves Chester Copely, the Yankee representative from New England, whose love Nell Sampson is also nearly seduced. Nell, like Mary Austin and Mrs. Oadley, lapses into insanity when her family falls apart during the war, but Copely redeems her in the end. Neal, himself a Maine Yankee and one of the original American innovators of colloquial characters and dialects, takes pains to invest Copely with all of the region’s typical idiosyncracies. Jonathan says

I never liked him . . . there was a sullen, implacable; a sort of passionless insensibility in all that he said and did, which bore hard upon us, I confess; with an expression of superiority . . . . His discipline was stern, implacable, unrelenting . . . as if—he scorned to be outdone, even in what he regarded as beneath him. (2: 40-41)

Yet, for all his coldness, Copely is Archibald’s clear favorite, and is rumored to be “in the confidence of Washington” (2: 41), suggesting an allegorical tie between New England’s political ideology and the Revolution as a whole. Neal privileges New Englanders as somehow more pure than other Americans: “The New Englanders, with a few exceptions, were the most substantial men for the service. There was scarcely a foreigner in their ranks; all were natural born Americans” (2: 39). New England contrasts with the South, creating a sort of dialogical opposition within the colonies that destabilizes national unity.

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42 Before this event Mary is also nearly seduced by Robert Arnauld, the father of Lucia and Clara, a character who represents both the vices and refinements of the Old World, yet nonetheless, joins the rebel cause after the Hessian attack.
Neal compounds this by making Colonel Clinton, the Virginian, Archibald’s chief rival and the seducer of Lucia Arnauld.

Jonathan prefers the southerners to the cold New Engander, yet he admits that “the levies of our southern brethren were sadly adulterated with such rabble as could be bought cheapest” (2: 39). Clinton, a handsome but unprincipled “voluptuary” who delights equally in conquests of war and love, not only becomes a negative characterization of the South, but also represents the aristocratic gallantry of war without firm political cause. He reinforces the familiar Early Republican representation of the South as Other (an association that goes back as least as far as Crevecoeur’s representation of slave society in South Carolina in *Letters from an American Farmer*), a society still devoted to the kinds of class distinctions that Neal opposes in the narrative.

By making Clinton a Virginian, Neal represents the ideological struggles within the American forces themselves, and reinforces the latent theme of individual local or sectional identities as contrasting legacies from the Revolution. The duel between Clinton and Archibald over Lucia causes a division between Southern and Northern troops, and Archibald is brought up on charges.

The rivalry for Lucia Arnauld represents an internal conflict for control over national representation, but Neal recognizes the problematic ambivalence of such an act. Lucia Arnauld’s very name registers this ambivalence, recalling both the “light” of Revolutionary inspiration and the duplicity of many who fought under that guise (Benedict Arnold). Archibald himself participates in this duplicity; what initially appear as heroic motives gradually unravel as the story unfolds. Clinton secretly “ruins” Lucia after she succumbs to his seductions, and this secret runs beneath the surface of the
narrative until it is revealed as part of the novel’s resolution. Archibald knows all along what Clinton has done, a fact that entirely destabilizes the motives behind his Revolutionary heroism. Does Archibald fight on principle, or out of bloodlust and desire for revenge? The question is further reinforced when, at the very end of the narrative, Archibald takes Jonathan on a walking trip to the places where their own part in Revolutionary violence originated, and Archibald tells him that on the night before the Hessian attack he had killed another man in a duel over Lucia. The hidden duel, fought between Archibald and a neighbor, reveals a bloody initiation ritual that subsequently descends into the violence of war, again suggesting that the Revolution was as much an internal civil conflict as one against a foreign oppressor.

Though Clinton is penitent afterwards and asks for her hand, Lucia refuses to marry him. She asserts her identity by accepting the fate of a “fallen woman.” Later she writes to Archibald explaining her choice:

I awoke as from a trance. I compared you [and Clinton] together. I wondered at my infatuation, wept and prayed. From that hour my resolution was formed; happen what would—I would not marry him—nor you—nor anybody—die, if there were no other means of concealing my shame . . . (2: 185).

Lucia’s choice asserts her own identity against male figures who attempt to control and contain her; that is, she rejects Revolutionary violence rather than passively submit to its dominion. Lucia resists a colonized identity through her act of refusal. She initiates American decolonization, which is further represented by Jonathan’s narrative inscription of her previously untold story. As Elleke Boehmer argues: “The silenced and wounded body of the colonized is a pervasive figure in colonial and postcolonial discourses, although its valencies obviously shift with the transition from colonial into postcolonial
history” (127). Neal’s novel exists somewhere along this liminal boundary. Jonathan as a male voice still speaks for a female gendered nation; moreover, Neal’s trope of the “ruined woman” contains and represses the violent origins of Revolutionary rupture. Yet, Jonathan, who himself bears the scars of a colonized body—“the deep cabala of premature old age”—re-inscribes Revolutionary history in a form that openly resists previous versions of the nation.

Neal’s narrative, because it graphically recalls the “violence in establishing the nation’s writ” does not so much begin the nation’s narrative, as suggest the beginnings of a postcolonial national narrative. Neal responds to what Bhabha calls the “pedagogical object . . . the people constructed in the performance of narrative” (“DissemiNation” 299). By focusing on memory as a resistance to history Neal participates in the “discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contestation of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performative” (Bhabha 299). Shirley Samuels sees memory in Seventy-Six not as a resistance but as a vehicle for conflating history and romance that creates a “congruence model” in the novel:

More than an indiscriminate combination of the genres of historical fiction and the sentimental novel, Seventy-Six, or Love and Battle [its title in England], presents the conflicts . . . on a familial and marital stage. . . . The question of the “battle” or of revolution is everywhere and always the question of “love.” Jonathan resigns his attempt to stay with the battles with the remark: “The war, and the men of the revolution . . . the army—my country; all are forgotten, or remembered, as a matter subordinate to the sorrow of Archibald and Lucia.” Such sorrow, I would argue, instead of obliterating the griefs of the national contest, becomes a memory device for keeping that national struggle personal. (89)

Samuels rightly acknowledges the genre connections between history and romance, but I contend that sorrowful memories are more than a “device” or figure in the narrative.

Memory occurs in the present—Bhabha’s “performative.” It intervenes upon the
established genres of history and romance, traditional narrative forms, and introduces popular genres like local eyewitness accounts or personal memoirs into them. Thus it marks both a spatial (in the sense of new literary “forms”) and temporal rupture of the national master narrative: memory asserts difference between official and unofficial forms, and also between past and present.

Jonathan eventually marries Lucia’s sister Clara, but by the time that he writes his account she is long since dead. He desperately mourns her loss and the fact that the present generation is not able to appreciate her sacrifice because they cannot remember it. He writes, “My children you can never know her value. From the time that you can recollect her, she was feeble and dim” (2: 152). Moreover, he tells them that their mother had martyred herself, “drugged with death, to preserve their father” (2: 153) after he loses a leg that was injured at the battle of Monmouth (a symbol of the divisiveness caused at that battle by the famous argument between generals Washington and Lee). Clara’s death constantly reminds Jonathan of the sacrifices that cannot be recovered through memory. In de Certeau’s formulation death is “an irreducible limit” (5), a rupture that modern Western historiography struggles against. Death marks the breakage between present living “progress” and a past that is excluded because it cannot be quantified. But rather than exclude by separating the “dead” past from the “living” present, Jonathan continually recalls his unresolved grief. He writes “in the moment,” and more than once in the text tells the children he must stop because he is overcome by grief at the thought of Clara’s loss. Like Lucia, Clara represents a female gendered nation. She contains the unresolved Revolutionary legacy, the unknowable, “irreducible” origins that Neal figures as either a dead or “ruined” woman.
Archibald’s decline—and by association, the Revolution itself—derives primarily from internal division. The climactic duel with Clinton cleaves Archibald, creating a narrative rift that remains open even as Jonathan writes almost fifty years later. Through the duel Neal illustrates conflicts over Revolutionary representation. By 1823 internal conflicts and sectional differences divided the republic. In that sense, *Seventy-Six* as a historical narrative cannot be resolved; thus, Neal turns away from the war narrative, and attempts instead to resolve the narrative romances. He abandons the chronological history of the Revolution in order to finish the story of Archibald and Lucia: “It is in vain that I would try to keep my attention any longer upon the object that I set out with—the war. I cannot. I can only remember Archibald, as he stood before me at his marriage, so spiritualized with beauty and expression” (2: 243).

The novel’s final chapter memorializes and spiritualizes the Revolution by transforming historical events into a melancholy remembrance. Archibald’s confession of the secret duel continues a process of internalizing Revolutionary violence so that in the end the war is represented almost wholly in terms of private individual experience rather than a broad political cause. Archibald and Lucia eventually agree to marry, and on the day of the wedding Copely and Rodman send letters from the field foretelling peace. Thus, Archibald and the Revolution have run their course. He marries Lucia and immediately after drops dead in her arms. By ending the novel with a wedding ceremony, Neal further reinforces his subversion of romance convention. The national narrative coheres not through a typically hopeful union but through a sorrowful fulfillment and the preservation of its memory. The novel’s final words, “HIS WIFE
WAS A WIDOW!” (2: 260), effectively seal off the potential for regenerating revolutionary violence, leaving only the legacy of ritualized remembrance.
Chapter 3

*The Pilot and Saratoga*: Discursive and Geographic Space in American Historical Representations

**Introduction**

By calling into question historical exclusions of democratic sacrifice during the Revolution, Cooper and Neal raise questions about the validity of Revolutionary histories which lead to questions about the nature of historical representation itself. Invariably, all writers of historical fictions confront problems of representing history, but the discourse of nationalism with its emphasis upon American identity significantly exacerbated representation as a literary problem for American writers. If the discourse of rational history did not tell the whole story of American identity, and local accounts only provided individual and fragmented versions of history, then how could one narrate a unified America? Where did a national identity lie? Both Cooper and Eliza Lanesford Cushing address these issues as fundamentally spatial problems in their narratives, *The Pilot* (1824) and *Saratoga* (1824).

In *The Pilot* Cooper turns to the sea as an alternate representation of modern democratic identity. He contrasts the historical associations of land, its ties to feudal social hierarchies, against the open, leveling geography of the sea; moreover, Cooper uses geographic differences as figurative embodiments of discursive differences. Sea characters speak differently from land characters. Their discourse represents a more modern egalitarian order. *The Pilot* is generally viewed as the first nautical tale, and this suggests the intimate connection between discourse and genre. Yet, clearly the land has its own genre associations in the novel (mainly gothic romance), and these come into
conflict with Cooper’s new sea genre as the narrative develops. Ultimately, the problems of space signify the historical problem of representing the Revolution as a clean break from the colonial and feudal past. The unresolved issues of the Revolution continue into Cooper’s present undermining any expression of a distinct and new American identity and complicating the story of national origins.

Though on its surface *Saratoga* appears to be a rather typical early republican romance narrative wherein a young woman defies her Loyalist father’s wishes and chooses a rebel lover, Cushing instead makes use of Saratoga’s local geography and history to rupture the logic of male-dominated, rational historical representations. As a site of discursive conflict *Saratoga* pits the white male discourse of military history and political disputation against stories of the land, popular legends and myths associated with the traditions of romance. The novel’s two volumes divide neatly between the historical events surrounding the American victory at Saratoga and a domestic romance narrative that runs parallel to, but only tangentially intersects with, the ongoing Revolution. The American land itself becomes the link between the official discourse of history and the fictional one of romance. Native American and Irish characters intervene at the ambivalent narrative center and serve as agents linking the two discourses. Their voices merge with the land and thus give agency to both the colonized land and its marginalized subjects. Cushing’s novel marks an incipient act of decolonization, a resistance to colonizing discourses that represent the nation as a silent female subject, but one that is clearly limited by the prerogatives of nationalism.
Cooper’s Colonizing Discourse

On January 7, 1824 Cooper published *The Pilot*, a conscious attempt at writing a new kind of story, the nautical tale. Looking back on the work almost twenty years later he writes: “It has been said that there is no original literature in America. I confess an inability to find the model for all the sea tales, that now so much abound, if it be not *The Pilot*” (*Letters* IV: 343). Cooper sets the tale during the American Revolution and, though the nautical tale would eventually become a genre in its own right, the 1823 preface announces a purpose quite consistent with other historical novels from the era, the preservation of some forgotten aspect of history. In *The Pilot* he focuses on forgotten naval heroes, and the choice itself says a great deal about the cultural and historical space that Cooper attempts to occupy in 1823-24 America:

The Author wishes to express his regret, that the daring and useful services of a great portion of our marine in the old war should be suffered to remain in the obscurity under which it is now buried. . . . If his book has the least tendency to excite some attention to this interesting portion of our history, one of the objects of the writer will be accomplished. (4)

*The Pilot* reminded Americans of the Navy’s significance as part of America’s origins, a politically loaded statement in 1824. Though relations with the British were tentatively amicable at the time, *The Pilot* was released almost simultaneously with the delivery of the Monroe Doctrine, a document that spoke directly to a reordering of Atlantic relations between Old and New World. The Monroe Doctrine effectively made the British and Americans allies against the reemergence of a monarchical order in Europe represented by the Holy Alliance, and attempted to prevent that threat from gaining any stronghold in the Western Hemisphere. In theory, the doctrine asserts

43 “Letter to Rufus Griswold.” For more on the publication background, see Kay Seymour House, “Historical Introduction.”
republican principles of the American Revolution as a privilege for the whole New World. Further, it sanctions the many revolutions against an Old World colonial order in Central and South America. Unfortunately, the document was little more than political rhetoric without the support of a strong navy, something that Cooper had long advocated but America’s economy was still unprepared to support. Without naval strength the U.S. remained dependent upon the British to enforce the Monroe Doctrine. Cooper exploits this irony in The Pilot by stressing a narrative ambivalence and weak resolution. The Pilot suggests that America’s domestic weakness and internal political compromises—especially over issues like slavery—force the nation to maintain complicated ancestral ties with England and “compromise” the very republican principles that the Revolution had sought to establish. The ambivalence between past and present becomes immediately apparent even in the structure of the preface.

As a literary act the preface stakes out the historical territory that the narrative will attempt to revive. Cooper uses the preface to differentiate his specific Revolutionary narrative from others that cover the same period, but it also situates the historical novel against other genres—Revolutionary histories, biographies, romances, etc.—by claiming a space that has heretofore remained in “obscurity.” This is partly the performance of the historical novel. It carves its own space as a genre by combining modern objective history with the popular literary conventions of romance. The specific relation between Cooper’s preface and narrative embodies the individual relationship between his place in the present and the historical narrative that he constructs. It literally juxtaposes the author’s present position in history against a narrative that attempts to contain a chosen
The preface establishes a tenuous relation between the present and the past. By acknowledging that Revolutionary naval heroes have been ignored previously, Cooper “inscribe[s] himself within the evolution of a present history” and at the same time establishes an unknown, an “other,” to be confronted by the narrative (de Certeau 38). From our perspective, the relation between past and present as defined by the preface reveals the particular context that Cooper works within: the specific limitations of 1824 America that shape the text. These cultural limitations manifest themselves as conflicts both within the narrative’s structure and the discursive style that Cooper imposes on it. His voice, even when he appears to be commenting solely on literary problems or narrative exposition, repeatedly exposes unresolved issues in 1824 America. The preface begins:

The privileges of the Historian and of the writer of Romances are very different, and it behooves them equally to respect each other’s rights. The latter is permitted to garnish a probable fiction, while he is sternly prohibited from dwelling on improbable truths; but it is the duty of the former to record facts as they have occurred, without a reference to consequences, resting his reputation on a firm foundation of realities, and vindicating his integrity by his authorities. How far and how well the Author has adhered to this distinction between the prerogatives of truth and fiction, his readers must decide; but he cannot forbear desiring the curious inquirers into our annals to persevere, until they shall find good poetical authority for every material incident in this veritable legend. (3)

Cooper calls upon readers in the present “to persevere” in imagining a past that can include this new type of tale and all of the ambivalences that it creates. According to Cooper, official “annals” don’t contain and cannot imagine what “poetical authority” and “veritable legend” can. Hayden White addresses this very conflict in his discussion of
“narrativity in the representation of reality” (Content 1-25). White argues that annals, because they do not possess narrativity, are considered “imperfect histories” (5) by modern readers; Cooper characterizes them in the same way. He suggests that the Revolutionary annals leave lacunae, like the “forgotten marine,” that he fills with a fictional narrative based upon “poetical authority.” But where does “poetical authority” come from? White argues that it comes from the coherence of narrative itself: “[T]he very distinction between real and imaginary events that is basic to modern discussions of both history and fiction presupposes a notion of reality in which ‘the true’ is identified with ‘the real’ only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity” (Content 6). The Pilot plays along this paradoxical boundary, hence Cooper’s oxymoronic description, a “veritable legend.”

I am arguing that the fictional narrative filling the gaps in the historical annals of the Revolution possesses verisimilitude not because of its “poetical authority,” but specifically because Cooper draws upon a discursive authority that derives from the imperialist agenda of American nationalism. Cooper utilizes the discursive authority of imperialist rhetoric as a means of resolving narrative conflicts between the old colonial order and a new national one. As John Carlos Rowe argues, “There is . . . an imperial heritage—a repertoire of methods for domination—on which the United States drew in the nineteenth century” (11). National narratives certainly represent one of these methods, but never without complication and conflict. “[T]he prerogatives of truth and fiction,” both of which are present in The Pilot, very much participate in a process of colonizing and translating the present threat that America’s colonial heritage represents for the future of the nation. In the novel’s opening paragraph Cooper defines the
Revolution as the complex transitional moment that divides the modern present from a traditional past:

It is across the waters of this disputed ocean [the Atlantic] that we shall attempt to conduct our readers, selecting a period for our incidents that has a peculiar interest for every American, not only because it was the birthday of his nation, but because it was also the era when reason and common sense began to take the place of custom and feudal practices in the management of the affairs of nations. (11)

De Certeau writes that “history is played along the margins which join a society with its past and with the very act of separating itself from that past. It takes place along these lines which trace the figure of a current time by dividing it from its other, but which the return of the past is continually modifying or blurring” (37-38).

Cooper’s narrative enacts the messy process of negotiating American cultural conflict, but literary conflict between the genres of romance and history becomes the frame for staging the narrative conflict. Furthermore, romance and history are inextricable from any discussion of discursive style in the novel; the genres become frames for representing both temporal and spatial complications: old hierarchies absorbed by a new democratic order; old national ties to the land submerged beneath new transnational networks of the sea. Rather than a peripheral element that separates Old and New Worlds, in The Pilot the sea metaphorically embodies the novel’s fundamental historical conflict. Margaret Cohen, speaking of sea fiction as an international genre, writes: “When Cooper imagines the unity of the Atlantic as the interactions of competing imperial projects, he suggests it as precisely the kind of space that has recently led to its renewed prominence in cross-cultural studies, where the Atlantic is seen to constitute, in Paul Gilroy’s formulation, ‘one single, complex unit of analysis’ defining ‘the modern world’” (483). Cooper chooses the American Revolution as the defining temporal
moment in the transition from old feudal to new modern world, and the sea, the “disputed ocean,” as an alternate geographic container of that ideological war. The sea, despite its democratic openness, holds great dangers beneath its surface, hence the need for an expert “pilot.” John Paul Jones, a real historical figure that Cooper refers to only as the mysterious “Mr. Gray,” figures as the ambivalent center of a narrative that ultimately addresses the problem of historical representation.

**John Paul Jones: Embodying the Ambivalence of American History**

As a character the pilot embodies Cooper’s own paradox. At the time of writing Jones’s name had not achieved historical fame; only a brief and rather polemical biography of him existed, but Cooper’s narrative hardly rescues Jones from this obscurity. If anything, one of the novel’s central themes revolves around Jones’ persistent desire to suppress the events of the narrative, because they do little to recommend his name to posterity. What memories of Jones that still existed were deeply ambivalent. As Cooper notes, he dies while “in the service of a despot,” (426), Catherine the Great. Furthermore, Jones’s only biographer had “a personal dislike” of him. Cooper could have simply been following the characterization in Nathaniel Fanning’s biography, where Jones is depicted as a kind of dandy motivated by selfish desire for fame, but he seems to sense the present metaphorical resonances of Jones’s obscurity and ambivalence. In 1824, America was losing sight of its democratic principles. Embroiled in domestic problems and strident political debates over slavery and the ramifications of westward expansion, memories of the Revolution were being displaced and manipulated.

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44 It should be noted that Jones was advised by Thomas Jefferson to take an admiralty under Catherine the Great when the American government refused to support an expanded naval fleet.
45 Kay S. House, “Historical Introduction,” xxiii. House is referring to the *Memoirs of the Life of Captain Nathaniel Fanning, an American Navy Officer, who served during Part of the American Revolution under the command of Commodore John Paul Jones, Esq.*, 1808.
Jones signifies the rupture between the original republican spirit of the Revolution and its cynical misrepresentations in the present.

Cooper enacts the problem of historical representation through Jones’s failed romance with his childhood love Alice Dunscombe. Jones is from Northumberland, and the bulk of the narrative takes place along its rocky coastline. Ultimately, he makes the political choice to leave his native homeland behind and engage in the modern international cause of democratic freedom. Alice, then, symbolizes the traditional attachments to a homeland and a nation that Jones must sacrifice for the cause of democracy. Cooper dramatizes the complexities of Jones’s decision—and the historical ramifications that it implies for the American Revolutionary break with the past—through the final dialogue between Alice and Jones which takes place on the liminal setting of a beach. Earlier in the narrative Alice had attempted to dissuade Jones from rebelling against his own country by connecting the ties of national allegiance to home and family. She states:

> Are not the relations of domestic life of God’s establishing, and have not the nations grown from families, as branches spread from the stem, till the tree overshadows the land! ‘Tis an ancient and sacred tie that binds man to his nation, neither can it be severed without infamy. (151)

Yet, near the beach they seat themselves upon an ancient oak tree uprooted by a recent storm, reinforcing Jones’s Revolutionary break from the past. Alice specifically compares Jones to the oak, but his life at sea disconnects him from a homeland, turning him into a modern citizen of the world. The disconnection with his ancestral past ties him to the American Revolution, but Jones also wants to get beyond even a transnational link between America and England. He seeks a new egalitarian order that transcends historical allegiances:
I might tell you that I am armed in the common cause of my fellow subjects and countrymen; that though an ocean divided us in distance, yet are we a people of the same blood, and children of the same parents . . . . But I disdain all such narrow apologies. I was born on this orb, and I claim to be a citizen of it. A man with a soul, not to be limited by the arbitrary boundaries of tyrants and hirelings, but one who has the right as well as the inclination to grapple with oppression, in whose name soever it is exercised, or in whatever hollow and specious shape it founds its claim to abuse our race. (151)

Cooper never loses sight of the complicated irony created by the rejection of blood ties and the discontinuity of revolution. While Jones gets caught up in his own hubris, Alice recognizes the familial disconnection created by Jones’s act of severing himself from the past. The Revolution ruptures the generations on both sides; thus, Alice says, “I shall never be the mother of children good or bad . . . . Singly and unsupported have I lived; alone and unlamented must I be carried to my grave” (362). Cooper makes a fundamentally gendered distinction between a femininized nation in Alice and the masculine problem of historical representation through Jones. Their romantic disconnection leaves Alice barren, unable to reproduce the old ancestral national order; thus, her feminine gender contains the originary rift that separates past and present. By contrast, Jones contains the present problem of continuity with that past order. In severing his relationship with Alice, he disconnects himself from the past. Cut off from the past, historical interpretation becomes rife with ambivalence and ambiguity; thus Cooper conflates ancestral blood with the blood of rebellion, and sets Jones adrift in history. Alice foresees this problem in ways that Jones’s own hubris makes him blind to:

You have gained a name, John, among the warriors of the age . . . and it is a name that may be said to be written in blood! . . . The blood of the subjects of your natural prince! The blood of those who breathe the air you first breathed, and who were taught the same holy lessons of instruction that you were first taught . . . (361)
But the Pilot replies:

> The blood of the slaves of despotism! . . . the blood of the enemies of freedom! You have dwelt so long in this dull retirement, and you have cherished so blindly the prejudices of your youth, that the promise of those noble sentiments I once thought I could see budding in Alice Dunscombe, has not been fulfilled. (361-362)

Jones angry retort marks America’s Revolutionary break from the past, but perhaps more importantly it also signifies the rupture that still exists in Cooper’s present. The fierce rhetoric of slavery, which is not necessarily anachronistic, nonetheless creates an ambivalent focal point in the dialogue, a doubleness that makes Jones’ words as relevant to the origins of the Revolution as they are to the ongoing slave debates in the American present. Jones insists that adherence to Old World social norms creates a dependent mindset, and “there lie the first seeds of slavery!” (362). Preserving the institution of slavery required an ideology of dependence, a hierarchical concept of the nation that Alice—and many American supporters of slavery--advocates when she claims that “the relations of domestic life [are] of God’s establishing, and . . . the nations grown from families.” Thus, the break between Alice and the Pilot simultaneously demonstrates the pre-history of America’s Revolutionary origins and the continued entanglements that the nation faces from unresolved domestic sentiments. Present socio-cultural ruptures determine Cooper’s historical narrative choices.

Alice counters Jones’s idealism with the realistic historical consequences of severing one’s tie to a homeland: “[W]hat will the men of the land of your birth transmit to their children, who will be the children of those that are of your own blood?” (363). And further, will the Americans “who know so well how to love home, sing the praises of him, who has turned his ruthless hand against the land of his fathers?” (364). Through
Alice, Cooper acknowledges that history encodes—and has encoded as he writes—the very patrilineal order that Jones rejects, and therefore can and will subvert the democratic principles that the Revolutionary heroes fought for. For all its modern progressive rhetoric history absorbs and then sublimates the paradox of its national origins. Jones wishes to be remembered as a great warrior who fought in the international cause of democratic liberty, but this means he must sacrifice the private domestic happiness and tradition of a homeland. When the main expedition of the narrative fails (the Americans are sent to Northumberland to pick up Jones and also kidnap certain high ranking British officials to be used as ransom for American prisoners of war), the Pilot tells Edward Griffith, the young American hero, that the official mission has been “sacrificed to more private feelings; ‘tis like a hundred others, ended in disappointment, and is forgotten, sir, forever” (345). The reality of Cooper’s present is that official history has neither remembered Jones, nor “a great portion of our marine in the old war.” Forgotten history, like the sea, becomes an open discursive space, a void that Cooper fills with his fictional creation. The Pilot’s obscurity represents what has been lost or forgotten in the present, and Cooper fills that void with an ambivalent myth of democratic origins.

Jones tells Alice: “The truth must finally be known, and when that hour shall come, they will say, he was a faithful and gallant warrior in his day; and a worthy lesson for all who are born in slavery, but would live in freedom, shall be found in his example!” (363). By setting the narrative in the historical past, Cooper ironizes Jones’s words. They become a failed prophecy; instead of vindicating the hero, Cooper makes him into a representative figure of historical obscurity and otherness, a Mr. Gray. John Paul Jones exemplifies the problem of historical representation; an obscured historical
figure, he fills the narrative gap left by historical annals. The Pilot then marks a site of
displacement and rupture. Cooper responds to the present through a figure from an
obscure past because the democratic spirit that inspired the Revolution had been
obfuscated, “sacrificed to more private feelings” in 1824 America.

**Discourse and Genre, Content and Form: Dissolving the Boundaries**

Ironically, though nautical adventure frames much of it, the bulk of Cooper’s
narrative focuses on the resolution of a domestic dispute that ostensibly follows the
pattern of a conventional Old World romance. Richard Barnstable and a select group of
sailors and marines go ashore on a dangerous area of the coast of Northumberland in
order to pick up the mysterious pilot, Mr. Gray, but before they can carry our their official
mission Barnstable encounters a young boy in disguise who turns out to be Katherine
Plowden, his affianced lover. Katherine and her cousin Cecilia, the lover of the novel’s
other American hero Edward Griffith, are being held captive in an ancient abbey that
once was owned by a family ancestor. Thus, Cooper establishes the conventional
romance plot of damsels in distress held in a tower keep until rescued by their heroic
young lovers, but lest readers become too confident in such romanticizing, Cooper
carefully undercuts these assumptions. His voice intrudes upon the narrative in the form
of a letter that Katherine gives to Barnstable describing her and her cousin Cecilia’s
situation:

That you may know what sort of a place we are confined in, and by whom
surrounded, I will describe both our prison and the garrison. The whole
building is of stone, both internally and externally, that would require
more skill than I possess to make intelligible; but the rooms we inhabit are
in the upper or third floor of a wing, that you may call a tower, if you are
in a romantic mood, but which, is nothing but a wing. (68)
The play upon romantic fictionalizing marks an attempt to re-direct the discourse toward realism. In effect, Cooper uses the modern authority of realism to colonize the fictional mode of romance: moreover, he marginalizes romance by tying it to representations of the pre-Revolutionary past. Thus, aside from its narrative purpose, Katherine’s letter performs a discursive stylistic function that is equally telling for understanding the present cultural significance of *The Pilot*. As Mikhail Bakhtin argues:

> Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon—social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning. . . . The separation of style and language from the question of genre has been largely responsible for a situation in which only individual and period-bound overtones of a style are the privileged subjects of study, while its basic social tone is ignored” (“Discourse” 259)

Through the letter, which makes an epistolary intrusion upon an otherwise third-person narrative, Cooper’s voice redirects the conventional literary and discursive associations of popular gothic romances—which glorify the social hierarchies of the feudal past—and translates them into the privileged discourse of objective realism.46

Shortly after Katherine’s letter the Americans go ashore and take refuge in a typically gothic moldering ruin located near the Abbey. They show little respect for the ruin’s historical value or meaning. Barnstable tells one of his men: “Faith, this has been a whole town in its day! we should call it a city in America, and furnish it with a Mayor,

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46 Hayden White sees the sort of stylistic “de-rhetoricization” that Cooper performs as part of the “domestication of history” that occurs in the nineteenth century: “The de-rhetoricization of historical thinking was an effort to distinguish history from fiction, especially from the kind of prose fiction represented by the romance and the novel. This effort was, of course, a rhetorical move in its own right . . .” (*Content* 65-66). White goes on to connect this movement to the disciplinization of history, a conservative act that ultimately suppresses the “historical sublime” and thus preserves the “centers of established political power and social authority” (81).
Aldermen, and Recorder” (297).47 The Americans respond to antiquity by colonizing it for present purposes, but this also entails a discursive colonizing that precedes an actual physical or geographic appropriation of the space. They “call it a city in America,” an imaginative act that precedes the act of imposing a modern historical order upon the ancient space. Barnstable’s statement encapsulates Cooper’s discursive actions and, further, connects those actions to the act of making American history. Cooper, like America itself, takes the unknown remainders left obscured by history and then becomes a “Recorder” who helps to build a nation out of that obscure past.

Because of its ancient architecture and ancestral familial associations, St. Ruth Abbey serves as the primary metaphor for Cooper’s discursive operation of de-romancing and colonizing the gothic past. He describes “[T]he large, irregular building” with “its dark and intricate mazes of halls, galleries, and apartments” (93) objectively as the realistic accumulation of architectural traditions “owing to the different ages in which its several parts had been erected” (93). Cooper repeatedly resists gothic literary associations, though they would be immediately apparent to any reader at this time:

There were diverse portentous traditions, of cruel separations and blighted loves, which always linger, like cobwebs, around the walls of old houses, to be heard here also, and which, doubtless, in abler hands, might easily have been wrought up into scenes of high interest and delectable pathos. But our humbler efforts must be limited by an attempt to describe man as God has made him, vulgar and unseemly as he may appear to sublimated faculties, to the possessors of which enviable qualifications we desire to say, at once, that we are determined to eschew all things supernaturally

47 Pilot, 297. The “ruin” as a conventional image of historical antiquity has a long literary history of its own, and American writers—including Cooper—repeatedly lament the absence of such ruins for American literary purposes, though Indian burial mounds are sometimes associated with New World antiquity. In 1860 Hawthorne writes, “It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes, either in the annals of our stalwart republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers, need ruin to make them grow.” Nathaniel Hawthorne, Preface, The Marble Faun, 1860, (New York: Signet, 1961) vi. Hawthorne’s comment reflects the fully romanticized vision that Cooper attempts to eschew at this early stage in the historical novel’s development.
refined, as we would the devil. To all those, then, who are tired of the company of their species, we would bluntly insinuate, that the sooner they throw aside our pages, and seize upon those of some more highly gifted bard, the sooner will they be in the way of quitting earth, if not of attaining heaven. Our business is solely to treat of man, and this fair scene on which he acts, and that not in his subtleties and metaphysical contradictions, but in his palpable nature, that all may understand our meaning as well as ourselves—whereby we manifestly reject the prodigious advantage of being thought a genius, by perhaps foolishly refusing the mighty aid of incomprehensibility to establish such a character. (93-94)

Cooper’s rather long intervention upon the narrative and its sarcastic tone suggests anxieties that border on scorn and aggressively marginalize the conventional motifs of gothic romance. Such anxiety also suggests a latent threat or resistance to the discourse of realism; that is, the gothic romance as Other, a discourse that opposes the dominance and authority of Enlightenment rationalism. Cooper attempts to direct, or re-direct, his audience toward realism as a modern alternative that combines historical annals and fictional narrative and offers a compromise to the genre conflict between objective history and high romance. The American historical novel as Cooper interprets the genre represents a discursive sublimation of antiquity, the imposition of a modern realistic discourse upon a traditional poetic one. Just as the Pilot guides American ships through the perilous submerged shoals along the English coast, Cooper, as historical novelist, submerges the vestiges of inherited formal conventions in order to tell a new American story.

The Abbey represents more than a site for a new trope, though; for Cooper it becomes a narrative incarnation of historical, land-based value-systems. Its geography enacts the contrived and labyrinthine logic of ancestral, and hence national, traditions. In The Pilot geographic boundaries of land and sea, through the difference of spaces,
expose ruptures between past and present, old and new orders. Life on land and life at sea represent alternatives, but not peaceful ones. Rather, they locate a struggle for dominance in the narrative and in the form. As a genre, the nautical tale would seem to assert an alternate formal solution to the conflict between traditional romance and progressive history—a realism that combines the two in the present, something like the natural coexistence between the domains of land and sea—but that would also assume a kind of resolution or narrative closure that simply does not exist in America in 1824. Though on the surface Cooper creates a modern tale of the sea, most of the novel’s actions take place on the traditional domain of the land. Ultimately, geographic space equates with formal or generic space and settings therefore become the containers of genre conflicts in the narrative. Hayden White argues that such paradoxical generic situations might actually serve as critical solutions, rather than literary problems:

One way of dealing with this problem is to view the literary work as the product (in part, of course) of a kind of dialectic of genres in which what the formalists called the “dominant” of the work is viewed as an attempted synthesis of all the generic conventions used to justify the work’s claim to some kind of realism. This approach to the question of genre gets us beyond any necessity to regard certain “paradoxical” aspects of a discourse of genre as indices of a “problem” and allows us to treat them as the solution to the question of why generic conventions seem necessary to the presentation of a worldview in the first place. (“Anomalies” 611)

The abbey, an ancient gothic edifice that embodies confusing family genealogies and historical national origins, becomes a space for the clash between Old and New World value systems. In the narrative these opposing ideologies frame the whole Revolutionary conflict: an old order based upon loyalty to feudal hierarchies and confusing genealogical history clashes with a new one that submerges and subordinates
the past by portraying the sea as an open democratic space, one associated with America’s Revolutionary spirit.

The novel’s climax occurs in the thoroughly domestic space of the Abbey’s dining room. In a scene that borders on comic absurdity, the American heroes Barnstable and Griffith along with a whole retinue of sailors appear at dinner with the intention of taking Katherine and Cecilia back to the ship. The British commander, Capt. Borroughcliffe, then surprises the Americans by calling out his own soldiers lying in wait who crowd into the room. A standoff ensues until Alice Dunscombe, the Pilot’s former lover, rises from the table and intervenes, opening a path between the two sides. But she is stopped when the Pilot appears and surrounds all of the British troops with more American sailors—so many that the nearby rooms are crowded with men. The ridiculous scene perfectly conveys the absurdity of attempts to contain the ideological conflicts of the Revolution within the conventional space of domestic romance. In effect, the novel’s climax performs the paradoxical generic clash between naval adventure and domestic romance; nonetheless, Cooper works within the overcrowded frame making each detail of the standoff account toward a resolution. Frederic Jameson explains: “The best method is always to turn such a problem into a solution in its own right, and make of this objective and incompatible alternation an interpretive phenomenon at some higher (meta) level.” (Archeologies 22). This is of course exactly what Cooper attempts, but ultimately land and sea remain separate domains. Cooper cannot achieve closure or synthesis of these geographic and generic spaces because his own place in the American present ruptures such unity. Though he attempts a kind of sublation of modern progressivism and traditional romance, Cooper allegorically reinforces the cultural logic of separate spheres,
a disconnection between modernity and tradition which he traces back to origins in the Revolution.

**Marital Unions and Unresolved Origins**

Cooper divides the novel’s two marital unions, like the rest of the plot, between sea and land. The sea as an open democratic space contrasts with the complex histories and allegiances that land represents. Richard Barnstable and Katherine Plowden symbolize the modern alternative union that the sea offers, and that union directly contrasts with Cooper’s realistically compromised land union between Edward Griffiths and Cecilia Howard. Despite Cooper’s attempts to resolve the conflicts between past and present and enact a successful transition symbolic of America’s future, both marital unions are ultimately ambivalent. As with Alice Dunscombe earlier in the narrative, the female characters, Katherine and Cecilia, embody the internal conflicts that destabilize and undermine American prospects for the future.

Cooper depicts Katherine Plowden as spirited and deeply patriotic. She openly rejects the old monarchical order that Colonel Howard (Katherine and Cecilia’s guardian) represents. Fiercely Loyalist and anti-democratic, Colonel Howard marks the last vestiges of the colonial order in America. When the Revolution begins the Colonel withdraws from his South Carolina plantation to England, taking Cecilia and Katherine, not only because of the threat of war, but also because of the parallel threat that his two wards may elope with their Revolutionary lovers. He tells Katherine and Cecilia: “no man, who has reached the time of life that entitles him to be called by that name, can consort with these disorganizers, who would destroy everything that is sacred—these levelers, who would pull down the great to exalt the little—these Jacobins . . .” (115).
The Colonel’s death aboard ship crossing the Atlantic and his final act of blessing the marital unions is Cooper’s attempt to enact the transition from the old order to the new. The Colonel hands over guardianship to the two young Americans, and with his last words he says to Griffith, “I had mistaken both you and Christopher Dillon [the novel’s villain, a Southerner who attempts to undermine the union of Cecilia and Edward] I believe; perhaps I may have also mistaken my duty to America—but I was too old to change my politics or my religion—I—I—I lov’d the King—God bless him—” (411). Just before this the old man asks to be buried, “like my ancestors, in the bosom of the earth—and in consecrated ground” (411), further reinforcing the geographic dichotomy of land and sea, and Cooper’s attempt to exclude the old order of the land through the death of its last generation. Yet, in an unmistakable irony, none of the marriages in *The Pilot* include children, suggesting a kind of irreconcilable discontinuity, not only between the present and the Revolutionary past, but also in the sense of imagining an American future.

From her earliest appearance Katherine Plowden marks a spirited resistance to her uncle’s guardianship. She writes to Barnstable that the colonel’s “dominion does not, like that of his favorite kings, continue from generation to generation, and one short year will release me from his power, and leave me mistress of your own actions . . . .” (67). Despite her active resistance, Katherine still willingly trades the colonel’s dominion for Barnstable’s. The new democratic alternative that the sea union represents nonetheless participates in a kind of internal colonization where Katherine as the new nation is subject to Barnstable’s masculine power: she becomes “mistress” of his “actions.”
Barnstable shows the same ardent patriotism as Katherine, combined with the attributes of a common sailor that he gains while growing up on New England whaling ships. He lacks Griffith’s formal education and aristocratic family ties; instead, he signifies a sea version of the heroic American yeomanry. As a new kind of American, Barnstable defies the traditional hierarchies of the navy; he commands the small schooner *Ariel* democratically, relying upon the advice of seasoned sailors like Long Tom Coffin and Richard Boltrope. Cooper notes that after the war Barnstable rises to the rank of captain where he

> was enabled to accomplish a great deal of the more peaceful part of his service accompanied by Katherine, who, having no children, eagerly profited by his consent, to share his privations and hardships on the ocean. In this manner they passed merrily down the vale of life together, . . .

(420)

Barnstable and Katherine, once having submerged—but not necessarily resolved—the entanglements of family and national origins, remain at sea where they navigate life together. In doing so, they also eschew the continuities of life on land. Though Barnstable inherits “the dwelling of his fathers . . . by regular descent” (419), he returns to sea, and chooses never to have children. Cooper avoids the paradoxical problem of American historical origins by resolving the complications of past and future with an alternate union that seizes upon the modern democratic present, but at the cost of sacrificing connections to both past and future.

The relationship between Cecilia and Griffith contrasts with Barnstable and Katherine by revealing the complications of a land-based union. Cecilia, caught between familial and romantic love, personifies the ambivalence of American historical origins, and reinforces, as it does with Alice and Katherine, the gendered rift between an old
colonial order and a new national one. Cecilia’s internal conflicts parallel the still present unresolved inequities of the Revolution. When Griffith asks her to escape from the Abbey with him, she says of the Colonel,

He is . . . my indulgent uncle and guardian—and I am his brother Harry’s child. This tie is not easily to be severed, Mr. Griffith, though, as I do not wish to see you crazed, I shall not add that your besotted vanity has played you false; but, surely, Edward, it is possible to feel a double tie, and so to act as to discharge our duties to both. I never, never can or will consent to desert my uncle . . . (144)

Cecilia’s “double tie” reinforces the dramatic conflict at the core of the novel, a conflict that signifies the paradox of contemporary America. The threat of a “crazed” Union is quite real in 1823, with the South as the geographic center of that threat. Moreover, geographic political divisions within the nation are already fastening themselves to conflicting value systems: the South’s old, agrarian, hierarchical order versus the North’s modern, industrial, democratic one. Both Griffith and Barnstable are from the North—New Jersey and New England, respectively—nonetheless, their marriages with southern women register an uneasy ambivalence. The geographic union does not automatically equate with a temporal one. Katherine and Barnstable elide the problem by staying at sea where they can avoid the complications of past and future, but Cecilia and Griffith acknowledge and then sublimate that conflict with a land union that ultimately lacks resolution.

The union between Cecilia Howard and Edward Griffith marks the realistic complications of a nation that combines traditional land based value systems with a new republican ideology. After their marriage Griffith remains at sea “until the close of the war, when he entirely withdrew from the ocean, and devoted the remainder of his life to the conjoint duties of a husband and a good citizen” (424). Though in the final chapter
Cooper makes sure to explain the subsequent histories of each of his secondary characters, he only vaguely outlines the lives of Cecilia and Griffith. The vagueness marks the inevitable lacunae of any attempt to narrate national origins. Cooper explains that “their joint inheritances made the young couple extremely wealthy” (424), and the novel closes with Griffith noticing the obituary of Jones in a newspaper some twelve years after the events of the narrative. Cooper never mentions children for this marriage, despite being quite clear about the childlessness of the other two love plots. The only reassurance for the young nation comes when Cecilia, anxious over the look on her husband’s face as he reads the obituary and associating it with some new political turmoil, asks, “Is not the new order of things, then, likely to succeed? Does the Congress enter into contention with the President?” (424). Griffith somewhat ambiguously responds, “The wisdom and name of Washington will smooth the way for the experiment, until time shall mature the system” (424).48

It seems unlikely that Cooper believes that the system has matured, in that the final chapter registers such a vague ambivalence about the future, a seemingly happy ending but one that ultimately veers away from resolution. The final words of the novel return to John Paul Jones, the shadowy Mr. Gray. Cooper veers away narrative resolution, back into the morass of historical representation, but then tries to control that shift with trite observations about naval expansion. Rather than directly confront the present domestic conflicts and historical ambivalence that Jones signifies, Cooper resorts to the commonplace trope of unruly passion as the explanation for Jones’s character.

Thus, Griffith says of Jones:

48 Though he doesn’t mention this example in his work, Griffith’s comment exemplifies Russ Castronovo’s argument that Washington’s name was repeatedly evoked in antebellum texts as a figure of cultural authority that could bring closure to the national narrative. See *Fathering the Nation*.
His devotion to America proceeded from desire of distinction, his ruling passion, and perhaps a little from resentment at some injustice which he claimed to have suffered from his own countrymen. . . . had he lived in times and under circumstances, when his consummate knowledge of his profession, his cool, deliberate, and even desperate courage, could have been exercised in a regular, and well-supported Navy, and had the habits of his youth better qualified him to have borne, meekly, the honors he acquired in his age, he would have left behind him no name in its lists that would have descended to the latest posterity of his adopted countrymen with greater renown! (426)

In the end Cooper reinforces Jones as a site of historical rupture, filling in the lacunae left by Jones’s obscurity with narrative interpretation. Cooper as historian performs the very act that Jones fights against: he sacrifices the titular character “to more private feelings,” justifying Jones’s historical obscurity by interpreting it as both the result of excessive passion and America’s failure to establish a strong naval fleet.

Nonetheless, by returning to Jones in the novel’s final words, Cooper creates ambivalence that extends into America’s present. Griffith refuses to reveal to his wife that the Pilot was Jones, claiming that he is bound by “a promise of secrecy . . . which is not at all released by his death” (426). Instead he tells Cecilia, “It is enough to know, that he was greatly instrumental in procuring our sudden union, and that our happiness might have been wrecked on the voyage of life had we not met the unknown pilot of the German Ocean” (426). But why is it “enough to know”? By keeping control over the “secret” origins of America’s present union, Griffith prevents the threat of rupture posed by a return of those Revolutionary origins. Ultimately, that control represents an imperialistic act; it asserts a discursive dominance over how the new nation is represented, leaving Cecilia “subject” to that representation. Edward’s final act in the narrative conflates and situates the origins of the nation within the same historical obscurity that Jones now lies. Michel de Certeau writes: “Even by returning endlessly to
the oldest primary sources, by scrutinizing the experience that linguistic and historical systems mask as they develop themselves, historians never apprehend origins, but only the successive stages of their loss” (22). Cooper only appears to consign national origins to an obscure and hypothetical past, while the fictional narrative he imagines ambivalently confirms the ascendancy of a new nation as colonizer.

_Saratoga: The First Female Response to the Revolutionary Historical Novel_  

Eliza Lanesford Cushing’s _Saratoga_ (1824), perhaps specifically because it is written by a woman, creates an alternate, even opposing, version of historical representation from Cooper’s _The Pilot_. Cushing’s feminine perspective counters and complicates a genre previously dominated by male authors.⁴⁹ Cushing’s narrative allegorizes opposition to the very kinds of colonizing rhetorical strategies that Cooper uses as tools for dominating historical representations of the Revolution. His historical “realism” attempts to create a discontinuity or breakage between past and present based upon exclusion and othering that not only marginalizes people but also marginalizes discursive traditions associated with the past—oral tales, legends, the stuff of romance. Cushing’s narrative resitutes the Revolution by literally grounding it in the land itself. America as a land becomes a metonym for femininity that resists representation of the Revolution as a contest for control or domination of that space; instead Cushing seeks a

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⁴⁹ Beginning with Scott’s enormously popular novels, which were followed by Cooper’s success, the historical novel had carved out a space for male novelists that was finally entered in 1824 by female writers like Lydia M. Child, Lydia Sigourney, and Harriet V. Cheney (Cushing’s sister), but Eliza Cushing’s novel is the only one of these to directly address the American Revolution, a subject area that had been the province of men, though there had been some notable histories of the Revolution written by women most especially Mercy Otis Warren’s work. Writers like Cooper and Neal recognized the threat women posed to the historical novel, since the primary audience for novels was overwhelmingly perceived to be female. In his novel _Seventy-Six_ (1823), Neal writes, “Men of talent have abandoned novel writing to women and children” (2: 229). Whether such perceptions were true or not remains uncertain. Most scholars now argue that significant numbers of men were also novel readers, though the social stigma attached to the form prevented them from acknowledging the guilty pleasure of such idle entertainment. See Cathy Davidson’s _Revolution and the Word_.

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figurative equal union between the American land and those men who engage in an imperial conflict to dominate it. Cushing disengages from masculine debates over the meaning of the Revolution, the sort of gendered divisions that both Cooper and Neal repeatedly utilize in order to figure the struggle over historical representation as romantic conflicts over “winning” a woman. De Certeau argues that “the will to define history ideologically is the concern of a social elite. It is based upon a division of ideas and labor” (29). Cushing resists the ideological division between a feminized nation and its male dominated representation by granting her heroine, Catherine Courtland, active agency. Furthermore, she opposes the narrative simplifications of gender that marginalize the female role in determining historical representation. Cushing employs discursive strategies of rhetorical ambivalence and ambiguity as vehicles of resistance to gender marginalization, ultimately attempting to dissolve the gendered boundaries between the feminized American land and masculine historical representations that speak for it.

*Saratoga* does not have a preface; it does not in any way begin by situating itself against other texts or versions of the Revolution. Omitting the preface neutralizes the distinction between present and past that had become commonplace for historical novels. Rather than establishing a narrative frame that hearkens back to an age that no longer exists, Cushing elides that breakage; furthermore, the title page makes absolutely no mention of an author, either male or female. The only text that stands between the title and the first chapter of the narrative--aside from publishing and printing information—is a quote:

I KNOW THAT WE HAVE ALL AN INNATE LOVE OF OUR COUNTRY, AND THAT THE GREATEST MEN HAVE BEEN

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In terms of genre Cushing’s quote appears to eschew the nationalist ideology that had become so conventional in American historical novels, even going so far as to suggest that patriotic rhetoric “fetters” those who cannot see beyond it. Compared to John Neal’s recently published Revolutionary historical novel *Seventy-Six; or, Our Country Right or Wrong!*, Cushing’s resistance seems obvious, but in the context of the narrative that follows, the quote becomes much more ambivalent.

*Saratoga* tells the story of a retired British major who moves to America with his wife and daughter shortly before the Revolution in the hopes of improving the wife’s health. She dies almost upon arrival and after burying her in American soil, the major decides to stay and raise his daughter in the area just outside Philadelphia. When the Revolution erupts, Major Courtland--whose name itself (Court-land) suggests the tension created by imposing an older, monarchical order upon land—feels compelled to re-enlist despite a deep love for America and his daughter’s clear allegiance to the rebel cause. Cushing’s quote from Petrarch, then, embraces the very rupture between past and present that a preface typically would create. That is, Janus-like, it faces both ways, applying equally to a Revolutionary past where Americans were forced to break free from the “fetters” of allegiance to Great Britain, but also, slyly, perhaps even subversively, resonates in the present by suggesting that current nationalist rhetoric “fetters” Americans. Such ambiguity, or ambivalence, initiates a rhetorical strategy of passive resistance that Cushing performs throughout the narrative.
The initial conflict in *Saratoga* is internal; the major is divided between “national feeling” toward England and attachment to the American land. The body of his wife locates this division:

He thought, at first, of returning directly to England; but, attached to the manners and scenes of America, he felt a painful reluctance at quitting it. A new tie also bound him to the land; it contained the ashes of his lamented wife; . . . England, too, had lost, for him, its most attractive charm. He loved it, as his country; he honoured its laws, its institutions, and its government; but she, who gave to every scene a charm, he could never more behold there; and the home of his fathers . . . would unceasingly awaken painful remembrances of her, who slept in a distant land. (8-9)

The dead body of Mrs. Courtland initiates the very rupture from which the narrative emerges; it also establishes the ambivalent function of the land which becomes the primary trope of *Saratoga*. That is, the feminine body marks the site of narrative conflict and hence Revolutionary conflict in *Saratoga*, first literally in the form of Mrs. Courtland’s ashes mixing with American soil and thereafter by natural transference and association to her daughter Catherine, the novel’s heroine. Yet, rather than representing the body as a site of violence—seduction, rape, conquest—as had become commonplace in Revolutionary narratives and other representations of early America, Cushing resists allegorical passivity. The land becomes instead a site of complex formal resistance to ideological domination, an Other that contains all anti-ideological, alternate perspectives

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50 Shirley Samuels, beginning with early iconography that depicts horrific violence against the female body in allegorical images of America as a woman, traces a lineage of violence towards women that extends through the Revolutionary romances of the nineteenth-century. Clearly, such violence remains as a latent element in Cushing’s depiction of the Revolution. Catherine refers to America as “a bleeding and struggling land,” and equates Revolutionary violence with “stabbing the mother who nurtured us” (1: 27). But such violence is not the focal point of Cushing’s narrative, nor is the concept of a nation neatly allegorized as a woman. I argue that Cushing as a woman herself resists such objectifications and gendered violence by constructing a complex, performative narrative, rather than an interpretive, figurative one. Catherine’s female body, like the land itself and its natural inhabitants the Indians, resists easy interpretation by maintaining neutrality through a clever ambivalence. Catherine becomes the site of contestation in the narrative, but not as a passive object; rather, her constancy and will determine the outcome. See *Romances of the Republic*
in the narrative. Such perspectives represent those individuals who exist outside of the colonial versus anti-colonial binary that the Revolution signifies. Indians are the best example of this association with the land, but, as will be shown, the narrative also connects other marginalized figures, like the Quaker Richard Hope and the Irishman Captain O’Carroll, to the land’s multivalent resistance. Ultimately, these other resistances supersede the imperialistic prerogatives of the Revolutionary conflict, and Catherine, despite her patriot sympathies, becomes the primary agent for negotiating a transition from colonial dependency toward a more egalitarian nation.

**Catherine: the Feminine and the Land as Other**

The gravesite of Mrs. Courtland locates the transference of attachment to the land from mother to daughter: “It was here that Catherine received the first lessons of virtue, which impressed her youthful mind; and thus the associations, connected with this spot, were of the most pure and sacred nature. . . . and often the father and daughter fancied that the spirit of her, whose remains mouldered beneath the flowery turf, hovered around them in this favorite resort” (1:11). Cushing articulates Catherine’s connection to America throughout the narrative as a way of reinforcing the subtlety of her ambivalent status. After telling Captain O’Carroll and her father, “I espouse no cause” (1:128), Catherine explains:

> America has loved and cherished every thing which is dear to me. Even the simple wild flowers, which I have gathered in her forests, seemed to me fairer and more fragrant than the rarest exotics, which were brought from other climes; and how often have you smiled upon me when I said, I love these wild blossoms because they have expanded in the air of my country, and been nurtured in the soil of the brave. . . . dear father, every event of my life links me, with fond associations, to this land; its rivers, its forests, its mountains, every feature of its lovely landscapes are like those of a dear familiar friend, whom death itself cannot shut from the affections and the memory. (1:128)
Catherine’s direct associations with America as a land supersede the Revolutionary conflict, but the final turn of her comments, comparing America to the memory of a dead friend, asserts Catherine’s difference, both from the land and from the mother who directly connects her to it. Cushing cultivates this difference because it locates the space that Catherine occupies in the narrative and Cushing occupies in the present. Neither an allegorical representation of the land, nor a return of her mother, Catherine marks a site of ambivalence that like the quote from Petrarch speaks to both past and present. Repetition and return of the same would be a symbolic death, a passive othering that Catherine resists.51 Her independent will differs from her mother’s, and Cushing clearly marks that difference. Her mother, “had few ties to bind her to her native land. Love of country, of fortune, of society, were all lost in the absorbing passion which centered in her husband. His heart was her home, his wishes hers, and where he was happiest, she would be so also” (1: 6). In other words, Catherine’s mother represents a fully colonized subject who makes no resistance to her marginalized role; furthermore, as if to stress that such colonization is still part of the present generation, Cushing contrasts Catherine with her cousin Amelia Dunbar.

Amelia, who stays with the Courtland’s after her father is killed in battle, personifies an alternate present of blind submission and resignation to mourning. Without her father’s dominating will as guide, Amelia steadily declines, receding into a passive grief that continues until she is finally rescued by the British Captain Talbot who

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51 In a discussion of death and repetition in literature Elisabeth Bronfen argues: “To repeat . . . implies that the second term doubles by copying the first. . . . The relation between the two terms is, then, inscribed not only by a dialectic of similarity and difference, but also by reciprocity. Although the value of the latter term is dependent on the former because derived from it, the former exists as recollection . . . . Repetition not merely imitates but also reproduces something new out of an earlier body” (103). See “Risky Resemblances: On Repetition, Mourning, and Representation.”
replaces her father. Talbot first loves Catherine, and is the favorite of Major Courtland because of his aristocratic family connections, but Catherine rebuffs his advances, despite her father’s wishes, ultimately choosing the American Colonel Grahame. Nina Baym refers to this as the “liberal” (as opposed to the “conservative”) plot variation of early Revolutionary novels:

[T]he protagonist first detaches herself from allegiance to the Tory side as it is personified in her father, in favor of the rebel cause as it is personified in a patriot suitor. Then, after a certain amount of spoken defiance, and perhaps some secret aid to the patriots, she brings her father around to her point of view, reconciling him both to her suitor and the republic. Since this story of a daughter who reconciles a monarchical father to a republican husband also controls the plots of New England historical novels, it should be thought of as the basic narrative through which the female national identity was conveyed. (170)

As a generalization Baym’s plot summary certainly makes sense, but it still relies more than a little on an allegorical simplification that fully accepts a colonized female identity in no way differentiated from the dominant white male national identity. The notion of a purely separate domestic sphere that represents, through a private love story, “nascent nationality” reinforces a totally submissive female identity that Catherine’s character seems to deliberately oppose. Catherine steadfastly resists ideological marginalization, albeit from the realistically peripheral social position of a woman; she fights the imposition of abstraction and cold reason, qualities specifically associated with her father

52 Rimmon-Kenan refers to this sort of narrative repetition, or replacement, as “destructive repetition” because it seeks to occlude the difference between the original and the repetition, creating an undifferentiated sameness that equates with death. Schlomith Rimmon-Kenan, “The Paradoxical Status of Repetition.”

53 De Certeau’s “will to define history ideologically” (29) parallels purely allegorical interpretations of national narratives which participate in “a division between ideas and labor.” Distinctions like the domestic private sphere and the official public sphere further exaggerate the disengagement of women from important determinative roles in American culture, something that Cushing writes against. Though she cites the work in the bibliography, Baym does not mention Cushing’s second Revolutionary novel, Yorktown (1826), which includes the fascinating central character Maude Mansel who not only rivals the male characters in her verbal ferocity, but is depicted as a giant who joins with the American rebels in battle. Baym argues: “Women protagonists in Revolutionary novels are not fighters; their gentility forbids it” (172). See American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860.
and with the American hero Grahame. Both her father and Colonel Grahame repeatedly attempt to translate Catherine’s words into the Enlightenment rhetoric of dispassionate reason—a rhetorical act that Eric Cheyfitz refers to as “the poetics of Imperialism”—but Catherine uses her words to resist such colonization.

Catherine blurs the boundary between past and present by keeping open an egalitarian dialogue between the imperialistic rhetoric of Enlightenment reason and the marginalized “natural” language of the colonized land. Her difference specifically emerges from her ability to resist with words, something her dead mother and the colonized land cannot do. Major Courtland—much in the terms that Baym uses—associates this resistance with the feminine and attempts to dismiss her: “Your fond, foolish sex have always some darling theme to rave about, and it is fortunate for us, that your fancies are only suffered to waste themselves in words, or the world would be kept forever in an uproar.” But Catherine continues the dialogue: “Alas, dear father, . . . since it is the only way in which they are permitted to waste themselves, we may be pardoned for making good use of our privilege; though, I think, were we less limited, we should soon disprove the assertions of those who predict misrule and anarchy, as a necessary consequence of suffering us to exercise power” (1: 129). Catherine’s radical response to her father exposes the threat that the imperialistic rhetoric of reason seeks to negate through marginalization. Of course, Catherine’s words hold true for Cushing as well, a woman who certainly makes use of her limited privilege with words. Catherine’s words, as in so many other places throughout the narrative, create a deliberate ambivalence, but Baym reads this passage as a reluctant admission of female powerlessness in a male dominated society: “The character must laugh when she says ‘alas,’ say ‘alas’ when she
laughs, because she is still in the power of a father who reflects and conveys an absolutist social structure. Unless society—that is, the powerful men who run society—is already prepared to listen, a woman’s speech is mere spectacle,” (174).

Baym does not discuss the important resolution of the dialogue where Captain O’Carroll first supports the major by alluding to Cleopatra as the downfall of Mark Antony, and Helen as the destroyer of Troy until Colonel Grahame, who does listen to Catherine, interrupts and shifts the argument back to the present saying that women inspire soldiers with courage. This actually sways O’Carroll who, as will be shown, is himself an important site of ambivalence. Catherine effectively ends the conversation, though, by stating, “I use no efforts to make traitors . . . nor would I be thought a partisan, because I love my country, and speak warmly in its behalf” (1: 130). What begins as a discussion of connection to the land quickly conflates with issues of gender and social power at the crux of Cushing’s Revolutionary narrative. Grahame, who clearly acts as the American ideological opposition to Major Courtland’s strict Loyalist interpretation of the war, advocates for the new American order, but Catherine withdraws from the ideological debate, refusing to be translated into the language of imperialism.

Despite her marginal social position, Catherine is the focal point and hinge of a narrative that performs an alternate version of the Revolution, one that explains the American victory not so much as a glorious military triumph but rather as a patient and sustained effort of passive resistance. The bulk of the narrative does not involve the Battle of Saratoga at all; rather, it takes place afterwards, during the winter of 1777 in an area quite close to Valley Forge, where Revolutionary soldiers are themselves enacting a patient resistance. For Cushing, the Revolution is not won during the war; rather victory
comes through the patient efforts of de-colonization and disentanglement from the paternalistic ideologies of the colonial past. Catherine persists in maintaining an open dialogue between Colonel Grahame, who is stationed at Valley Forge, and Major Courtland, who, along with Captain O’Carroll, is on parole at his home outside Philadelphia while convalescing from wounds received at Saratoga. The family home becomes an alternate site of conflict, another place that offers another way of resolving ideological oppositions that Catherine manifests instead of espousing. In this sense Cushing inverts the typical ideological division and that subordinates the “domestic sphere” as ancillary to the “official public sphere.” She blurs those boundaries by domesticating the Revolutionary conflict and furthermore privileging a domestic resolution over the official military one.

When, early in the narrative, Amelia’s Loyalist father, Colonel Dunbar attempts to trap Catherine by asking her to perform a Christmas toast in the presence of a number of British soldiers, Catherine raises her glass and responds:

“The land we love.”

“That, Miss Courtland, is rather an ambiguous sentiment,” said the Colonel with severity; “and were there a dozen rebels present, it would suit them just as well as if they had hearts as loyal as either yours or mine.”

... “And because a rebel drinks to the land he loves, may we not do so also, uncle? Does party feeling indeed run so high, that two nations, using the same language, can no longer express themselves in similar phrases, without being suspected of harbouring a sinister meaning?” (1:18-19)

Catherine’s ambivalent words perform Cushing’s own ambivalence as a woman writer in the American present. Part of the discursive strategy of Saratoga, then, involves the rupturing of typical cultural associations, especially ones about the Revolution, which Cushing successfully redirects through the perspective of an other.
The choice of Saratoga as a site of initial conflict has important implications. As has already been noted, the bulk of the narrative occurs after the battle and in a different location, but Saratoga marked a critical turning point in the Revolution. For the first time the Americans proved that they could stop the British, and in many ways the victory could be attributed to the land itself. Burgoyne’s army, after what at first seemed like a triumphant march down from Canada in the summer of 1777, became overextended; the Americans drew the British army in and then cut off its lines of supply. Howe, whose forces lay to the south, never sent desperately needed support, and Burgoyne was forced to capitulate in October 1777 after severe losses. Another event occurred at this time, though, one that seized and consolidated America’s cultural imagination in ways that continued to evolve for many years after the war—the murder of Jane McCrea. Cushing, through repeated references in the text, clearly has McCrea’s death in mind as she writes, and this cultural event, which had little or no direct military significance, nevertheless becomes a critical juncture or conflation of the land, the Revolution, and the complex issues that negotiate between these two. Margaret Reid writes: “It is no accident that this crucial turning point in the war [Saratoga] provided the culture with one of its most popular legends, yet it remains a surprise—of all the happenings in New York during those few months—the one event to capture the public imagination most passionately was the random death of a young woman who was purportedly in love with a British officer” (19).

Though the factual details are obscured by the many differing versions that circulated for years after her murder—it even became the subject of a French novel
published shortly after the Revolution—the actual Jane McCrea was born in New Jersey, the daughter of a Loyalist minister. The family was deeply divided over the Revolution, and upon her father’s death in 1769 she went to live with her patriot brother in the area near Saratoga, New York. Her childhood love in New Jersey, David Jones, had joined the British army, and was a lieutenant under Burgoyne in 1777. Hereafter the details become sketchy. As the British army approached, American families retreated, but Jane, now twenty-four, chose to stay behind—she had apparently been contacted by Jones and anticipated their marriage. In most accounts the bride-to-be then ventured into the wilderness, attempting to meet the British forces as they approached; she was captured by Burgoyne’s advance Indian scouts who apparently murdered and scalped her. The various legends explain the murder quite differently: some accounts describe a simple act of Indian barbarity; others have two Indian chiefs fight over McCrea, accidentally killing her in a scuffle over bounty money; others actually have her mistakenly killed by American soldiers during an attempted rescue. At any rate, Burgoyne’s questionable use of Indians for what was characterized in England as a civil conflict became the focal point of blame for the atrocity. McCrea’s story quickly spread throughout the colonies and became a rallying cry for the patriot forces.54

Cushing uses the resonance of McCrea’s tale as a kind of sublimated counter-narrative that situates Catherine’s actions against the legendary murder. When Major Courtland and Captain O’Carroll are wounded and become prisoners at Saratoga, the McCrea legend is inverted. At the time Catherine is staying at Albany in the home of a

54 For a more detailed account of the events surrounding McCrea’s death see Lewis Leary’s introduction to Rene Hilliard-d’Auberteuil, *Miss McCrea: a Novel of the American Revolution*, 1784.
Quaker friend, Richard Hope.\(^5\) Against the advice of others, she visits the American encampment—entirely unmolested—and helps nurse her father back to health. The inversion serves a cultural function by reinforcing the honor of American troops as opposed to their British opposition, but Catherine’s actions also have important symbolic resonance within the narrative. By journeying into the forest near Saratoga she replicates McCrea’s act, but unlike the moral ambiguity of a romantic rendezvous, Catherine seeks her father. That is, rather than McCrea’s submissive role that depicts the female as a subject of sexual violence, which of course also figures as a colonizing act, Catherine’s journey initiates the dialogic link between her father and Grahame, who at this point have twice met on the battlefield yet have never spoken a word to one another. While at Saratoga Catherine meets Colonel Grahame for the first time, and a symbolic transfer occurs. Grahame has twice saved Major Courtland by preventing his Indian friend Ohmeina from tomahawking the major in battle. Catherine tells Grahame, “I owe to you my father’s life” (1: 127), and hereafter in the narrative Catherine’s allegiance is clearly divided between a growing love for Grahame and a consistent devotion to her father. Catherine thus becomes a site that links America’s past and present, but resists the colonizing efforts of both.

Margaret Reid, though she refers to *Saratoga* and its use of the McCrea legend, does not acknowledge the significance of Cushing’s usage. She writes:

Most romances allowed Jane’s image into their stories precisely to obviate a recurrence of the tragedy. For example, the “enthusiastic and high-minded” heroine of *Saratoga*, Catherine Courtland, remembers “the frightful deed” of “the murder of the lovely and unfortunate Miss McRea” while she imprudently wanders alone in the woods; “she shuddered, as if she actually beheld the perpetrator of the cruel act before her.” In this

\(^{55}\) Hope, as a Quaker, marks another example of marginalized passive resistance to the colonial versus anti-colonial military conflict in the narrative.
Quite the contrary, Catherine defies the “conservative function” of caution, not only when she journeys into the American encampment, but also later in the narrative when on a walk with her cousin Amelia she again goes into the forest to gather a rare moss. Amelia stands outside the woods, terrified by Catherine’s temerity. When Ohmeina mysteriously appears, Catherine wants to follow him, but Amelia becomes hysterical: “You must not, Catherine, . . . Look around; here is nothing but trees and rocks; no human being to aid us, and the fate of the murdered Jane McRea may be ours, if you persist in following the steps of this savage” (1: 207). Jane McCrea looms in the background of the narrative, not as a cautionary tale, but as an iconic figure that Cushing tropes in order to destabilize cultural assumptions about feminine submissiveness and domesticity. Catherine’s actions are specifically juxtaposed against Amelia’s “conservative” behavior. The colonial translation of McCrea’s legend—to which Amelia responds--figures her as a victim of passions, a foolish transgressor of female social codes punished for intervening in the military affairs of men. Catherine’s actions reinterpret that intervening act, allying femininity with the marginalized other and defying the rhetoric of colonialism. Catherine asserts her difference from Amelia and

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56 Reid actually confuses the narrative scene in which these lines occur. Catherine recalls the murder of Jane McCrea as she stands upon a balcony overlooking the Hudson. The scene accompanies the first appearance of the Indian Ohmeina whom Catherine notices as he rows a canoe across the river during a tempest. Clearly, Ohmeina is associated with a sublime natural scene that inspires an “instinctive horror” (1:37) in Catherine, but one that she quickly overcomes as she sees him converse with Richard Hope: “[Ohmeina] revealed a form of unrivalled symmetry, whose exquisite proportions might well have served a sculptor for the model of an Apollo. His countenance was noble and dignified, and as he fixed his piercing eyes upon the group who stood motionless before him, awe and admiration filled the mind of Catherine, and banished every vestige of that fear and abhorrence, with which she had regarded him, during the violence of the tempest” (1: 41).
Jane McCrea, much as she asserts her difference from her mother, though both remain a vestige of her past.

On the level of genre Jane McCrea’s story emerges from the popular folkloric traditions of tales, legends, myths, and romance. As such, it marks an alternate explanation of the events of the Revolution, one intimately connected to an American cultural imagination and what might be termed an unofficial history of Saratoga. *Saratoga: a Tale of the Revolution* does not just combine an actual event with a fictional narrative; it combines official and unofficial versions of history. McCrea’s story is the obverse of Catherine’s, but its presence is felt throughout the narrative, not only through specific allusions, but also through its associations with the land and its people, the Native Americans.57

**Indians and Irish: the Role of the Other**

It is no coincidence that Cushing repeatedly invokes Jane McCrea in conjunction with Ohmeina’s appearances in the forest. Not only is Jane’s story physically connected with Native Americans, but it also traces a journey into the domain of the Native American as Other. As a cautionary tale it warns women especially against transgressing the boundaries of their own social space, disconnecting society from the land—the forest—which in the colonial version is associated with primal terror. But, as has already been shown, Cushing tropes former colonial associations as part of a rhetorical de-colonizing of America. Ohmeina and his female counterpart Minoya, emerge from the

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57 Northrop Frye’s work connecting romance to the seasonal cycles of nature and the earth itself certainly establishes these connections on a broad, archetypal level, but Cushing’s narrative enacts quite specific cultural associations as well. McCrea’s murder evokes a past association with nature in America, one closer to the Puritan trope of a terrifying wilderness. During the Revolution the story served the cultural purpose of unifying the colonies against England and effectively polarizing the conflict. For Cushing, Jane McCrea’s story marks another site of breakage, a boundary between past and present that Catherine subsumes and seeks to unify. See Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, and *Anatomy of Criticism* . . .
ambivalent rift between the American land and those who would colonize it. Ohmeina’s personal history represents this complicated ambivalence. He is a Mohawk chief, but has lived among the colonists and received a Christian education at Dartmouth where “he imbibed a strong attachment for the Americans” (1: 77). After his education he returns to his people, marries, and has five sons. When the Revolution breaks out he “preserve[s] the neutrality which had been recommended to him by the Americans. . . . nothing could induce him to engage in hostilities; neither the threats and intreaties of his brethren, nor the alluring bribes of our people [the British—Captain Talbot tells this story] were of the least avail. True to his determination, he steadily resisted both . . .” (1: 77). Ohmeina, much like Catherine, passively resists the imperialistic conflict that the Revolution represents, implicitly understanding his own marginalized position.

Ohmeina only becomes involved in the war after a jealous rival chief attacks his tribe, murdering his entire family. Grahame, who had become a friend of Ohmeina’s, happens upon the horrific scene, and along with his men, routs the attackers but only Ohmeina and Minoya survive the onslaught. Thereafter, Ohmeina swears allegiance not to an imperial American cause but to Grahame himself: “the grateful Indian devoted his life to his benefactor” (1: 80). The distinction is important: Ohmeina only recognizes a local, communal identity, one intimately associated with the land itself. Grahame, as Cushing’s patriot hero and Catherine’s love interest, must ultimately make the same sort of local, material connection to the land that Ohmeina and Minoya, as Native Americans, embody. In a larger sense, Cushing’s narrative resists the conservative allegory of a new national identity that simply transfers the colonizing authority of a British father over to a republican husband by rejecting the commonplace metaphor of the American land as a
silent and submissive female subject. Catherine, Ohmeina, Minoya (and eventually the Irishman O’Carroll), through their associations with the land, figure as a third term or category that opposes the binary opposition between Grahame and Major Courtland, patriot resistance and colonial power. The land as a metaphor resists imperialistic translation, and Ohmeina and Minoya both participate in this resistance. They become guides for Grahame’s ultimate union with the land. Death, the ambivalent originary rift, opens a space for Catherine to unite with the American soil through her mother’s female body, but Grahame’s male attachment to America is at first ideological—America represents a cause, one that is dissociated from its local connections to the land. Ohmeina and Minoya guide Grahame’s symbolic union with the soil and his subsequent rebirth, which Cushing enacts (not coincidentally) through a local or native genre, the captivity narrative.

Grahame’s captivity occurs shortly after the victory at Saratoga, and once again the forest becomes a site of narrative congruence. But Cushing begins the chapter where Grahame disappears by describing Saratoga from the present:

Villages and towns now rise on the site of those forests which, forty-five years since, witnessed the fierce encounter of two adverse armies; and churches, and seminaries for the instruction of future patriots and statesmen, occupy the spot, where the cruel savage immolated his unfortunate captive, or performed the rites of his untutored worship. The frowning wilderness has become a scene of gaiety and splendor . . . Nor can the foot of the American press this soil, mingled, as it is, with the dust of the great and the brave, without a thrill of national pride, as he recalls the events of the year so glorious in the annals of his country, and which have shed a tinge of the romantic, we had almost said of classic interest over the wild scenery of the north. (1:134)

The American present, Saratoga itself, is built upon a space that contains events extending beyond the associations of the military conflict there. Cushing’s voice
intervenes in a way that specifically unifies the events of history with their present through a connection with the “soil.” Quite the opposite of Cooper’s national narrative where his voice evokes the Revolution to sever modern Enlightenment rationalism from the distant colonial and feudal past, Cushing pursues a union between the traditions of romance and those of modern history. Furthermore, by interpolating an Indian captivity narrative as a genre that intervenes precisely between the historical narrative of the Battle of Saratoga and the domestic romance that occurs at the Courtland home outside Philadelphia, Cushing situates Native American culture at the ambivalent center of the national narrative.

On the night following the surrender Grahame disappears without a trace after a walk in the forest with O’Carroll. Search parties look for weeks, but no sign of Grahame is found until he reappears at the Courtland home months later and tells his story. In mythic terms Grahame’s abduction becomes a ritual rebirth into a new identity figured as an initiatory underworld journey. After walking with O’Carroll Grahame returns to the woods to retrieve a pistol he has left behind. There Ohmeina’s former enemy, Kamaset, takes Grahame prisoner and brings him back to a wigwam at the bottom of a ravine. The wigwam, filled with animal skins, bones, trophy heads, and human scalps, suggests Grahame’s return to the earth and loss of a stable identity. Kamaset then takes him further underground to a cave where Ohmeina, who has also been captured, lies bound. Minoya, a squaw from Ohmeina’s tribe now Kamaset’s slave since the raid, promises to help them. Grahame’s “underworld” experience marks a transculturation that forges his association with the land. As Kathryn Derounian-Stodala notes, “Even hostages initially intended for trade or enslavement might find their status changed and become adopted as
tribal members. Many Native Americans did not possess the same constructs of racial
purity as Europeans and found it perfectly acceptable to replace tribal members lost to
war and disease with people of other races” (xvii). 58

Grahame, Ohmeina, and Minoya eventually kill Kamaset and escape, but
Grahame is wounded. On the verge of the forest they find the house of a veteran from
the Battle of Bennington, and there Ohmeina and Minoya heal Grahame’s wounds, also
symbolically healing the rift between the events of the Revolution and their association
with the American land. Cushing’s interpolated captivity narrative, then, functions as
much more than a sop to popular reading audiences. The kidnapping, both physically and
symbolically, immerses Grahame in Indian culture, solidifying the bond between him and
his Native American counterpart Ohmeina. The captivity, as a return to the earth,
validates Grahame’s connections to the American land. It also establishes a number of
important parallels between Minoya and Catherine.

If Ohmeina parallels Grahame as a heroic Native American other, so too does
Minoya for Catherine. Both are highly spirited women—Minoya shouts with glee when
Kamaset is killed and as they struggle to escape is “transformed into a perfect fury” (1:
250). Both are healers: while Minoya nurses Grahame back to health, Catherine nurses
her father, and later Captain Talbot as well. Ultimately, though, the same patience and
constancy that determines the Revolutionary outcome defines both these characters.
Catherine bides her time until her father accepts her love for Grahame, while Minoya
patiently endures the disgrace of slavery under Kamaset. That is, both patiently endure
their time as colonized subjects, but never submit their will to that subjection. When they

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58 Though these had long been popular, Cushing’s narrative parallels another captivity narrative of
transculturation also published in 1824, James E. Seaver’s famous version of the captivity of Mary
Jemison, A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison.
are finally introduced to one another, Minoya is “peculiarly attracted” (2: 28) to Catherine; the two hold hands and exchange rings, solidifying their connection. By contrast, Amelia shudders when Minoya places a bracelet upon her. Minoya, like Jane McCrea, highlights Catherine’s otherness as a woman, and helps establish Catherine’s connection to an alternate, ambivalent perspective on the Revolution. Her sameness with Catherine and their difference from Amelia figures as an incipient national break with the colonial past, but as will be shown, Minoya also becomes an ambivalent marker for American difference in the present. In the end, Cushing uses Catherine’s difference from Minoya as a solution to the present problem of distinguishing national identity from native identity—a concern that clearly reflects American anxieties about Indian Removal and how those correspond with the discursive project of nationalism in 1824. The entire second volume of *Saratoga* addresses the problematic transition toward a national identity. Catherine’s union with Grahame at the novel’s conclusion projects forward, imagining a present where differences are resolved through a series of exclusions that result in the myth of a unified and stable republic. But these narrative exclusions are essential to understanding the limitations of Cushing’s present and the failure of American nationalism as a solution to the problems of the colonial past. Ironically, Cushing turns to an Irish character—who clearly symbolizes a third category in the conflict between England and America—as an ambivalent agent who brings about narrative resolution.

Cushing binds O’Carroll’s convoluted personal history, which clearly parallels Ireland’s, to the union between Catherine and Grahame, and increasingly foregrounds the Irish story as the novel progresses. O’Carroll’s story displaces the national narrative,
shifting it to an ambivalent figure, and thus allegorically removing unresolved legacies of the Revolution to a marginalized Other. The narrative strategy performs three distinct functions. First, it resolves the discursive disconnection between official Revolutionary history—i.e., the description of historical events at Saratoga and also the discursive representatives of Revolutionary history, Catherine’s father and Colonel Grahame—and the discourse of romance by placing the Irish characters at the juncture of the two seemingly opposing discursive forms. In other words, the Irish story that centers on O’Carroll intervenes and complicates the discursive binary between history and romance. Second, it displaces Revolutionary violence upon the Irish. The battlefield recedes and the focal point of violence becomes the Irish villain Dalkeith who is determined to avenge himself upon O’Carroll and his old love Marion Spencer who spurned him years before in Ireland. Finally, Cushing links O’Carroll’s discursive voice, a voice of romance, to the Native American voice, but then excludes both in the end.

During his parole as a prisoner at Saratoga, O’Carroll becomes Grahame’s close friend, creating a bond that Major Courtland repeatedly mocks as almost treasonous. O’Carroll as an Irishman stands between England and America, and specifically marks the liminal space between the colonial and anti-colonial. When O’Carroll admits to his friend Captain Talbot that the American cause is “not quite so bad as we have heretofore considered it,” Talbot responds, “none but a native of your rebellious country, O’Carroll, would pretend to excuse it” (2: 62). O’Carroll also marks a critical site or juncture for genre in the novel, and this too is associated with his Irishness. Cushing depicts him as excessively passionate, given to romantic adventure, especially in the form of storytelling and mythology. This becomes a hinge connecting history and romance—objective
accounts and cultural myths, i.e., a modern, male-dominated, rationalism versus its more egalitarian Others represented in legends and tales. When Grahame goes missing O’Carroll searches for him relentlessly until he comes upon the abandoned wigwam hidden in the ravine. While there, he hears a mysterious ghostly chant telling him to leave the place. He later finds that the voice was Minoya’s, another character given to “romance and adventure” (1: 257) and stories associated with the land. When he finally gives up searching and returns to Philadelphia, O’Carroll tells Major Courtland the strange story, but is mocked again:

   Upon my honor, O’Carroll, this is a tale worthy to grace the legends of the nursery! Why, man, the wonderful history of Aladdin’s Lamp, or the still more edifying and instructive relation of the White Cat, who was transformed into the most beautiful princess of the age, cannot be compared to it. (1: 181)

Catherine objects, standing between her father’s dismissive reasoning and the prerogatives of romance: “Dear father! . . . you do not right to treat with so much ridicule what Captain O’Carroll has related.” But the major continues:

   Have I not rather placed it at the head of all the marvels of this or preceding ages, and declared it worthy to be bound in gilt and morocco [as traditional romances were], for the edification of future generations? . . . The sprites who dwell in our American forests are not so civil, as those which haunt the dells and thickets of the mother country. They warn and prophesy, from their murky recesses, till they are hoarse, while ours . . . preserve a silence so invincible, that, till now, I never saw the ears, which had drunk in the sound of their voices. (1: 181-182)

The major’s comments locate a suppressed conflict in the early republic that Cushing’s narrative confronts. No one has heard “the sprites who dwell in our American forests” because their voices have been suppressed, excluded. Edward Watts explains that in the years after the Revolution republicanism was “elitist and colonial” (15) in nature: “republicans championed an eighteenth-century conception of authorship based in
Scottish commonsense philosophy that depersonalized the process of composition yet intimately connected the author to more general forms of social authority” (14). The major represents this elitist colonial American view where the voices of Others have been systematically marginalized and silenced by the rhetoric of Enlightenment rationalism. O’Carroll’s Irish voice ruptures the colonial silence and creates a rift through which America’s own suppressed mythical voice—the Native American—can be heard. O’Carroll as an author of stories is marginalized by the Irish stereotype that characterizes him. Bhabha argues that the stereotypical figure marks the ambivalent center of colonial discourse, the discursive construct around which colonial power is produced: “In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth . . . only then does it become possible to understand the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse—that ‘otherness’ which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity” (Location of Culture 96).

The complicated Irish subplot effectively displaces Revolutionary violence by associating that violence with the same passionate excess that characterizes the Irish figures throughout. Dalkeith, a Catholic reprobate, represents the malevolent result of disconnection to one’s native land; he stands in sharp contrast to Grahame whose captivity develops an intimate association with the soil. When Dalkeith comes to America he assumes the name Forrester, another pointed misrepresentation, and falsely claims to serve the American cause. But later he explains his true motive of self-serving

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59 The “othering” of Revolutionary violence is further reinforced through a number of minor scenes involving Benedict Arnold whom Cushing depicts as a personal enemy of Grahame’s. Grahame considers Arnold profane: “He has a kind of animal ferocity, which may pass with some for bravery. He loves the battle for its carnage and conquest . . .” (1: 123).
vengeance, which he conflates with the land itself: “not affection for my own country, to which I owe no obligation, but hatred to this land of knaves and fools, induced me . . . to wish for their ruin” (2: 168). Dalkeith dies by falling upon his own dirk, but before his death he is taken to a hidden cottage deep in the forest. He has been living there with an elderly couple who lost their own son at the Battle of Trenton, reinforcing his role as a surrogate for the war’s violence, but also creating a parallel with Grahame’s own stay in the cottage of a war veteran after his captivity. Dalkeith’s plans are foiled and he dies, eliminating those aspects of Revolutionary violence that represent passionate excess—personal animosity, vengeance, bloodthirst—and leaving behind Grahame’s disinterestedness and principle as the Revolutionary legacy.

Cushing’s final narrative connection with the Irish associates them with Native Americans whose relationship with the new nation parallels that of the Irish to the English. When Grahame helps the Spencers escape from Dalkeith’s plot against them, he employs Minoya as their nurse and after O’Carroll marries Marion, Minoya chooses to return to Ireland with him. Minoya’s rather strange decision not only solidifies the connection between Irish and Native Americans; it also exposes a present cultural rift that disrupts Cushing’s narrative resolution. Indians and Irish are left over as remainders at the end of Saratoga, and despite Cushing’s apparent good will towards Native Americans, the conclusion does not imagine a realistic solution to the American Indian problem; instead it opts for a mild version of Indian extinction. Cushing ignores the apparent narrative solution of marriage between the beautiful Minoya and Ohmeina because such an ending would suggest union and perpetuation of an alternate American “people.” Ohmeina, like Minoya, chooses to remain a servant; he lives the rest of his
days in Grahame’s household. Carolyn Karcher argues that Cushing “allows friendships between her Indian and white characters . . . hinting that white women might benefit from emulating the courage and hardihood of their Indian sisters. Yet Cushing squelches the possibility of a love relationship between the white hero and the Indian woman who helps him to escape from captivity. Indeed, her Indian protagonists decline marriage with each other, opting for the status of mere appendages to the whites they have chosen to serve” (34). Cushing rejects integration as a possibility at the end of the narrative, but the resolution does accurately depict the open problematic cultural failures of Indian Removal and slavery. Minoya’s emigration to Ireland is its own kind of Indian Removal, as Ohmeina’s servitude is its own kind of slavery.

As remainders at the end of the narrative, Irish and Indian characters mark the present limitations of an American nation. For Cushing they are an irreducible limit, and exclusion becomes her only narrative choice. Ironically, she falls back upon the trope of American paternalism—willing submission to the White Father or slave master. Even the Irish are denied admission to a white American nation in the end. Nonetheless, Saratoga as a narrative engages its ambivalent present and reinterprets the national project as a complex process of negotiation that involves various marginalized others.

Cushing, quite literally, grounds American discursive conflicts and \footnote{60} in so doing

\footnote{60} Though Karcher is correct in these conclusions, the option for a union between the white heroes and their Indian counterparts is never acknowledged by Cushing. Both Catherine, who is clearly attracted to Ohmeina’s perfect physical form—she compares him to a classical Apollo—and Grahame, who teaches Minoya to play the flute (?)—but loves her as a “sister”—sublimate their physical attractions, denying the possibility of a union with an Indian Other. Minoya’s clear attraction is to O’Carroll, with whom she is connected throughout the narrative, and for whom she seems a much better mate than Marion whose weakness caused an initial failure in their relationship. See Carolyn L. Karcher, The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child (Durham: Duke UP, 1994).

\footnote{61} Noel Ignatiev offers an interesting analysis of Irish assimilation to white society in nineteenth-century America by arguing that pro-slavery advocacy among Irish immigrants permitted the gradual transition from an original status as parallel—even beneath in some cases—with free and enslaved blacks to a fully assimilated whiteness by the end of the century. See How the Irish Became White (New York: Routledge, 1995).
destabilizes the authority of dominant, rational, progressivist histories in favor of a more open and dialogic interpretation of the American future.
Chapter 4

Situating the Nation: Local History and Transnational Identity in Cooper’s *Lionel Lincoln* and Child’s *The Rebels*

Introduction

The questions of historical representation that Cooper and Cushing address in the spatial terms of the sea in *The Pilot* and the land in *Saratoga*, become significantly more complicated when situated locally. This chapter examines two Revolutionary historical narratives that use the local geography and colonial history of Boston as a vehicle for discussing the imbricated relation between Revolutionary origins and America’s colonial and genealogical heritage. In *Lionel Lincoln* and in *The Rebels* James Fenimore Cooper and Lydia Maria Child narrate American identity through family histories that are clearly products of an English Atlantic, and they distinguish that transatlantic identity from the Revolution’s violent origins. Both narratives depict Revolutionary violence not as an historic break with the past, but as an aberrant moment brought on by class issues associated with British colonial imperialism; thus, both attempt to establish continuity between American colonial and national identities, while at the same time eliminating the threat of class-based violence. Excluding mob violence means excluding the democratic “other” and preserving a social hierarchy in America whose history extends back to a colonial aristocracy. Both narratives perform a discursive elision that simultaneously excludes aberrant violence and turns unruly mobs into heroic yeomanry, but not without disjunctures at the intersections of historical events and fictional narrative. These produce rifts in the controlling discourse of an American republican (and national) myth that expose latent fears about popular democracy in America.
The year 1825 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the first battles of the Revolution, which were fought in and around Boston. From Cooper’s detailed description of the city’s geographic landscape and the Battle of Bunker Hill to Child’s depictions of the “massacre” on King Street and the razing of Hutchinson’s colonial mansion during the Stamp Act riots, Boston itself locates the cultural conflicts from which the Revolution emerges. Moreover, the city embodies—in its architecture, its place names, its cultural, religious, and economic diversity--the very colonial issues that America itself was still sorting out as it began the jubilee celebrations. Unlike narratives set on the frontier or at sea, which lend themselves to uncomplicated myths portraying the nation as carved from a barren wilderness or glorifying the imperialistic call to “conquer space,” the Boston setting suggests the complexity of American origins by stressing the integral part that the city played in the larger transatlantic colonial network.62 Boston represents a site of cultural exchange, and further by 1825 it had come to symbolize America’s colonial history. By marking Boston as an originary space, both writers acknowledge America’s present difference from its colonial past, but as the narratives prove, the nation itself had not as yet fully dissociated itself from that past—nor was it entirely willing to do so. Quite the contrary, both Cooper and Child depict versions of the nation that are far from simplistic allegories celebrating an essential American identity; instead, both writers—in different ways—use Boston’s complicated history and geography to locate the messy process that is on one hand an act of

62 “Let us conquer space.” John C. Calhoun’s famous phrase is part of a larger speech before Congress calling for federal funding of internal improvement projects that he argued would “bind the Republic together with a perfect system of roads and canals.” Although the plan was vetoed on Madison’s last day in office in 1817, Calhoun’s rhetoric captures an important aspect of America’s attitude toward continued westward expansion. See also Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution, 70-102.
decolonization, and on another, an act of appropriating the colonial past for America’s own project of imperial domination as the nation continued its westward expansion.

*Lionel Lincoln:* “I am but little of a genealogist, madam.”

On February 7, 1825 Cooper released his third Revolutionary novel in four years. *Lionel Lincoln* was to be the first in a series of “Legends of the Thirteen Republics,” but the plan was aborted after this novel which deals with Massachusetts. Cooper’s poor health, financial problems (both his own and his publisher’s), a subsequent seven year stay in Europe away from research materials, and perhaps most significantly, *Lionel Lincoln*’s commercial failure, all led him to abandon the project.63 The novel received mixed reviews: in general, critics praised the historical depictions of the battles at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill for their accuracy—Cooper had done a good deal of research on the battles and traveled to Boston to scout the geography as well—but the fictional gothic narrative of Lionel Lincoln’s dark family secret was criticized as improbable. *Lionel Lincoln* passed into obscurity after the nationalistic fervor of the Jubilee, and though Cooper wrote a new preface and added notes for an 1832 edition of his works, the novel never enjoyed the success of his previous Revolutionary novels, *The Spy* and *The Pilot*.

In its most basic form *Lionel Lincoln* is a story of Lionel’s return to his birthplace in Boston after leaving as a small child to be educated and raised in England. He returns as a British major along with the soldiers being sent for the siege of Boston in April 1774. On the ship Lionel meets Ralph, an old man of patriot sympathies who also is returning to Boston after many years absence (Ralph later turns out to be Lionel’s father). As the

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63 This was the last novel that Cooper published with his longtime associate Wiley. His next, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), was published by Carey and Lea.
historical plot unfurls, the first battles of the Revolution are fought at Lexington and Concord and at Bunker Hill, while Lionel, through Ralph’s guidance, discovers the mysterious circumstances surrounding his mother’s death and his father’s subsequent confinement in an asylum back in England. All the events reach a climactic moment of recognition in the end when Lionel finally discovers his confusing origins.

The original objections to *Lionel Lincoln* have persisted with critics; that is, most scholars point to a generic dissonance between the historical narrative and the gothic plot that Cooper fails to resolve. Donald Ringe writes, “There is no real connection between Lincoln’s family problems and the basic setting of the book—beseiged Boston” (40). John McWilliams states, “No reader to my knowledge has ever been satisfied with the book, and all have been dissatisfied for similar reasons. Cooper does not clearly link his gothic tale of the sins of the Lincolns with his historical account of revolutionary Boston” (73). I believe the generic rift that these critics describe, rather than a qualitative failure, actually points to an important gap in our critical appreciation of Cooper’s work, a gap that results from criticism which equates nationalism with American essentialism. Critics view Cooper’s work as failed because the second half of the novel follows a labyrinthine gothic plot where Lionel disengages himself from the Revolution and searches for his familial origins. These eventually lead him behind American lines to his mother’s grave—much like Catherine Courtland in *Saratoga*—but, rather than embrace his ties to America, Lionel turns away from this path and in the end returns with his new wife to the family’s paternal estate in England. Thus, the novel concludes with the hero turning away from America, and critics perceive this as a narrative failure because it occludes a distinctive American identity. Lionel neither chooses the American cause, nor the
democratic ideal of a republic of yeomen that affirms difference between the Old and New Worlds.

Michael Warner writes, “Nationalist criticism has always had a repertoire of themes by means of which colonial writing could be seen as essentially American: the wilderness, natural man, the social covenant, individualism, the rise of democracy and the self-made man, the revolt against Europe and the sublimity of new beginnings” (51). These themes have long informed readings of Lionel Lincoln, but their “nationalist impulse” prohibits the possibility of an “English Atlantic” identity. Furthermore, such readings streamline the local complexities and paradoxes of the colonial situation in Boston that destabilize traditional nationalist “themes.” Yet, I am arguing that Lionel Lincoln embraces a transatlantic national identity and the colonial paradox as well, what Warner refers to as “a fundamentally extralocal imagination [the English Atlantic] . . . poised against the very local imagination of territorial possession [colonial Boston]” (67), and these alternatives explain much of what the novel’s critics have missed. Cooper’s “double” narratives connect as an explanatory myth of America’s Revolutionary origins. The historical descriptions of the first moments of violent rupture between England and America at Lexington and Concord and the subsequent Battle of Bunker Hill are figuratively explained through the gothic narrative in the second half of the novel.

The real question that Cooper addresses in Lionel Lincoln exists in his present: how does one exclude America’s violent Revolutionary legacy from a new nation currently under the threat of civil conflict over the issue of slavery? Moreover, Cooper’s narrative responds to those who invoke the very rhetoric of the Revolution to support new violence. The gothic narrative represents Revolutionary violence through the tropes of
madness, imbecility, and contagious disease—all familiar conventions of the form—which intersect with the historical events in and around Boston to create the violent Revolutionary rupture between English soldiers and colonists at Lexington and Concord, but the novel’s climactic moment—and generic disjuncture between the historical and gothic modes—occurs when Lionel is wounded at the battle of Bunker Hill.

On the night before Bunker Hill Lionel ascends to the graveyard atop Copp’s-hill, where he encounters Job Pray, a mysterious, imbecilic figure who turns out to be Lionel’s half-brother (though that remains unclear until the conclusion). Job represents an alternate and aberrant version of the Lincoln family genealogy, the unacknowledged product of Lionel’s father, an English lord, and a Puritan serving woman, Abigail Pray. Job is a liminal figure who becomes a kind of guide in Lionel’s search for his origins. In the gothic scene at the graveyard Job tells Lionel that he “loves to come up among the graves, before the cocks crow; . . . [to see] the dead walk when living men sleep” (165). Lionel swears that he hears hushed voices, “strange and unearthly sounds lingering about this place, to-night!” but Job says “’tis the clods on the coffins, the dead are going into their graves ag’in” (166). That night, Lionel dreams first of his father as he had known him in childhood, then of Job dancing along with the ghosts “among the tombs like a being of another world. Sudden and loud thunder then burst upon them, and the shadows fled into their secret places” (168).

Lionel wakes to the sound of British cannon fire, and says, “I have been dreaming but by halves” (168). Yet, the gothic imagery synthesizes Lionel’s personal history with the Revolution. The sounds of thunder in his dreams are the beginnings of the battle, and the noises of the night before were from the Americans digging their entrenchments.
Nonetheless, Lionel’s ascent brings him into contact with the very forces, both personal and historical, that haunt his present. If he dreams “but by halves,” Cooper maintains ironic ambivalence about which half is truer for Lionel. In a sense, Lionel stands between these two halves of his own reality. The rebels digging into Bunker-hill are Lionel’s own ghostly other, a latent part of himself that has lain buried. He literally awakes to his own genealogical heritage, which includes the genetic aberration of a morbid sensibility inherited from his father—whom Lionel believes is still in a mad house back in England, but is really Ralph, the old man he met on the ship over to Boston. The family morbid streak produces madness that eventually leads to Revolutionary violence. Lionel, a British soldier, rushes into the battle and is shot “by a dying yeoman, who exerted his wasting strength to sacrifice one more worthy victim to the manes of his countrymen” (188).

The wound marks a narrative hinge; Lionel lies comatose for seven months, a kind of death and rebirth that has a double function in the narrative. First, it forces Lionel’s participation in Revolutionary violence into a remote past, and second, it serves as Cooper’s chosen break with the historical past; that is, it establishes the parallel nature of the subsequent gothic plot. Michel de Certeau explains historiographical breaks in a way that applies to all historical fictions, and thus deserves quoting at some length:

This lacuna, a mark of the place within the text and the questioning of the place through the text, ultimately refers to what archeology designates without being able to put in words: the relation of the logos to an arché, a “principle” or “beginning” which is its other. This other on which it is based, which makes it possible, is what historiography can place always “earlier,” go further and further back to, or designate as what it is within the “real” that legitimizes representation but is not identical to it. The arché is nothing of what can be said. It is only insinuated through the labor of division, or with the evocation of death. (14)
Lionel’s symbolic death is Cooper’s “labor of division.” He awakens to a new era in American history built upon Cooper’s arché that separates the violent origins of the Revolution’s first moments—signified by both Ralph and Job—from the traditional republican myth of a war fought by heroic yeomen acting on rational principles. Earlier in the narrative Ralph, a fierce supporter of the patriot cause who predicts that revolution is imminent, takes Lionel to a Sons of Liberty meeting where Cooper’s discursive contrast is crystallized. The vituperative Revolutionary speeches of Ralph and Job Pray sound nothing like the controlled speech of the patriots:

Most, if not all of them [the Sons of Liberty], wore an air of deliberation and coldness that would have rendered their sincerity in the cause they had apparently espoused, a little equivocal, but for occasional expressions of coarse, and sometimes biting invective that they expended on the ministers of the crown, . . . Certain resolutions, in which the most respectful remonstrances were singularly blended, with the boldest assertions of constitutional principles, were read, and passed without a dissenting voice, though with a calmness that indicated no very strong excitement. Lionel was peculiarly struck with the language of these written opinions, which were expressed with a purity, and sometimes with an elegance of style . . . (74)

Afterwards Lionel tells Ralph that he doubts a revolt will occur: “Men on the threshold of rebellion seldom reason so closely, and with such moderation. Why, the very fuel for the combustion, the rabble themselves, discuss their constitutional principles, and keep under the mantle of law, as if they were a club of learned Templars” (76). Cooper’s specific emphasis on the discursive rationality of the Americans implies an alternative Revolution, one that is juxtaposed against the gothic madness and imbecility of Ralph and Job.

Cooper attempts to “legitimize” his representation of a binary opposition between reason and madness that divides the Revolution by casting alternate voices as part of the
gothic narrative and utilizing the myth of a heroic American yeomanry. Lionel’s coma creates a rupture or rift, a figurative void that elides the local complexities that complicate Cooper’s arbitrary historical break. Thus, the “rabble” in Boston, who supposedly initiate revolution, defy explanation by behaving rationally and Cooper is forced to further divide and essentialize the nature of the American revolutionaries. He contrasts American commoners with English ones: “If the [English] commons took offense at a new tax, or a stagnation in business, why they got together in mobs, and burnt a house or two, . . . But here it is altogether a different sort of thing. . . . They [Americans] refuse their natural aliment to uphold what they call their principles;” (50).

Of course, Cooper’s division is mythical, especially in Boston, where mobs regularly assembled and razed houses. One of the more famous of these was the Hutchinson mansion, which was razed during the Stamp Act riots of 1765. Cooper describes the mansion in *Lionel Lincoln*, but omits the fact that it was rebuilt.

When Lionel awakens from his coma, he confronts the fundamental thematic choice of the narrative, whether to marry (the androgynously named) Cecil Dynevor and move forward with his life or join with Ralph and give himself over to madness. He marries Cecil late that same night in a bizarre gothic scene: as the minister asks if there are any objections to the union “a huge shadow r[ises] upon the gallery, and extend[s] itself along the ceiling, until its gigantic proportions [a]re seen hovering like an evil spectre, nearly above them” (242). Ralph haunts the union, and that night Lionel disappears with him before the marriage is consummated. The union between Lionel and Cecil signifies a potential resolution to the Lincoln family’s genetic aberrance. Cecil is Lionel’s fully creolized cousin. She lives with her grandmother Madame Lechmere,
Lionel’s great-aunt, in a huge colonial mansion in Boston; thus their union heals the rift between metropole and colony, but Ralph’s intervention must still be resolved.

In a series of improbable events Ralph leads Lionel to his mother’s grave behind American lines and Cecil follows. Lionel tells Ralph that he is torn, that in following him he has “forgotten the oath which, at the altar, I had sworn” to Cecil “but the delusion has passed away . . . [M]y guardian spirit is at hand [Cecil], and remember, thou no longer leadest a lunatic!” Ralph responds, “Unthinking boy, that sacrilegious foot treads on thy mother’s grave!” (334-35). Lionel’s physical journey in the narrative leads him back to his mother’s body, whose silence represents colonized America—she literally lies within the American encampment. The place also presents Lionel with a symbolic choice:

“My wife,” said Lionel, extending his hand, kindly, towards the shrinking form of Cecil.
“Thy mother!” interrupted Ralph, pointing with his emaciated hand to the grave. (337)

By leading his son to the grave, Ralph guides Lionel to a moment of original separation between England and colonial America, one that precedes the Revolutionary break and displaces its significance. That is, Lionel’s mother’s death coincides with the fundamental shift in relations between England and the colonies following the Seven Years War when England began to assert imperial dominion. Lionel’s mother’s death is the initial rupture, but the break becomes convoluted by a lie that Madame Lechmere tells Ralph, a lie that drives him mad. Though Lionel’s mother really dies of smallpox while waiting for Ralph to return from settling his family succession in England, Madame Lechmere contrives a story that she was “dishonoured” and died while giving birth to another man’s child while her husband was away. Ralph surrenders to madness and Madame Lechmere has him confined to an asylum in England, in effect usurping control
of the family name until she can arrange the marriage between young Lionel and her
granddaughter Cecil. As they stand at the grave Ralph tells how Madame Lechmere
conspired to have the Lincoln name “descend in the line of her own body” (338).

Cooper’s narrative convolutions deserve unpacking. In the end Madame
Lechmere, the representative of a colonial aristocratic order, is the true villain of Lionel
Lincoln. Her lie that Lionel’s mother was unfaithful parallels a colonial lie that American
yeomen were unfaithful to the British empire. In both cases such a lie is perpetrated in
order to preserve an untenable social order in America, an illegal one as far as the Sons of
Liberty are concerned. When Ralph, Lionel’s still unknown father, lures his son to his
mother’s grave, they journey back to an initial rupture. Death creates the rift from which
proceeds Madame Lechmere’s lie and Ralph’s subsequent madness.64 The secret must be
told at the gravesite because Lionel’s mother represents a connection to the land, both in
a physical sense—she literally mingles with the earth of this place—and as a destination
that has brought Lionel back to his American origins. For Ralph, the representative of
British aristocracy and patrilineage gone awry, the place marks the ruptured bond
between England and America. Death destroys the union, but it is the lie that produces
Revolutionary madness. Following Cooper’s logic: American colonial aristocrats, which
in Boston especially had included figures like Thomas Hutchinson and others who
profited enormously by the old colonial system, sought to preserve their status by
perpetuating a lie that America had been unfaithful to England. The lie backfires when it

64 At the warehouse Abigail Pray confesses: “The gentle spirit of thy mother had hardly departed, before a
vile plot was hatched to destroy the purity of her fame. . . . She [Mdm. Lechmere] thought to lead by her
soothing arts, aided by his wounded affections, the husband to the feet of her own daughter . . . . But how
little did we know the difference between rooted passion and passing inclination! The heart we thought to
alienate from its dead partner, we destroyed; and the reason we conspired to deceive, was maddened!”
(354)
causes the spontaneous eruption of Revolutionary violence in America, an act that Cooper symbolically explains as the Lincoln’s recessive trait of morbidity--one that extends in the family all the way back to the original Puritan ancestor who first came to America after the death of his own wife--to re-emerge, this time as full-blown Revolutionary madness.

When Cecil tries to pull Lionel back from the seduction of his own madness, she asks, “Lionel, . . . do you credit him?” But Ralph responds: “all this must he believe, and more! Once again, weak girl, did thy grandmother throw out her lures for the wealthy baronet, and when he would not become her son, then did she league with the spirits of hell to compass his ruin [italics mine]” (339). Lionel “must” believe the lie in order to continue the madness that Ralph has induced, and thus maintain the rupture between England and America. Ralph directly connects his story to the national rift by telling Lionel he will prove the truth of all of this “provided thou wilt swear eternal hatred to that country [England] and those laws by which an innocent and unoffending man can be levelled with the beasts of the field” (340). He holds English laws responsible for first delaying him from settling his paternal estate and then depriving him of his human rights when he is locked away for twenty years.65 Lionel answers, “more than that will I swear—I will league with this rebellion” [italics mine] (340).

65 Charles Hansford Adams makes many of the same connections between Ralph’s madness and Revolutionary anarchy, though he specifically frames the discussion in terms of the law. He argues that the final deaths of Ralph and Job Pray permit the Revolution to “stand metaphorically free of the lawless impulses that threatened it. Similarly, Lionel’s rejection of Sir Lionel’s madness purges the Lincoln family, and thus Lionel’s personal identity, of lawlessness” (51). Adams, like many earlier critics, objects to the novel’s resolution, though: “the problem is that the logic of Lionel’s personal drama, instead of paralleling and reinforcing the logic of his political awakening, takes us in the opposite direction. England and America derive symbolic meanings from the structure of Lionel’s personal quest that are precisely the reverse of the values that we would intuitively assign to them, and that they in fact have in relation to Lionel’s political quest” (50). The problem that Adams and other critics encounter with Lionel Lincoln specifically relates to nationalistic assumptions about Lionel’s “political quest.” Critics, including Adams,
Boston: Reconstituting the Revolutionary Narrative

*Lionel Lincoln; or, The Leaguer of Boston:* Cooper’s title literally specifies the formal conjunction that the subsequent narrative illustrates. A fictional gothic story of a young man awakening to the secrets of his family origins conjoins with an account of the origins of the Revolutionary War in Boston. The two parts of the title suggest the parallel fictional and historical narratives that follow. Boston, then, marks a local geographic intersection of a gothic narrative and the initial historical events of the Revolutionary conflict. Speaking of the importance of local geographies in a postcolonial context, Peter Hulme writes, “postcolonial work is to a degree reconstitutive; to begin to understand local geographies and histories and to allow them to count in a way previously denied are crucial counterhegemonic moves” (39). Hulme is discussing the homogenizing effects of the postmodern world, but the quote applies equally to the hegemony of nationalist criticism which obviously tends to privilege the national agenda over the local one. But I am arguing that Cooper very specifically draws upon the subtleties of Boston’s local geography and history, that the specific details of the siege of Boston and the complicated colonial reactions to that siege frame the narrative in a way that acknowledges the complex local origins of an American identity in relation to an English Atlantic.

“Leaguer” is both a noun and a verb, and its myriad interpretations resonate throughout the text. As a noun it suggests “a military camp, esp. one engaged in a siege; a besieging force,” which in the novel would imply the British blockade and occupation

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see the novel as a failure in Cooper’s patriotic intention for the work—it was to be a novel about “Lionel’s conversion to the American cause” (50)—but I contend, quite to the contrary, that Lionel’s personal drama does parallel and reinforce “the logic of his political awakening” if we consider the novel in the light of Cooper’s transnational present. That is, rather than seeing the work as affirming national differences, Cooper’s genealogical narrative heals the rupture by explaining Revolutionary violence as part of a remote, gothicized past, a genetic aberration that has been purged from the family tree.
of Boston. But the noun also denotes “a member of a league” or confederation, as in the
unification of the colonies against the British. Even the act of leaguing or leaguering has
a double meaning--both to “lodge” or “encamp” and to “besiege, beleaguer” (*OED*)--
which creates ambivalence in the novel. The narrative begins with Lionel on board a ship
that is part of the larger fleet that brings the British troops to be quartered in Boston in
April 1775, and it ends with Lionel’s return to England with his wife as part of the fleet
that evacuates Boston after the British leaguer fails. The failed attempt to contain the
boundaries of the Revolution within Boston resonates interestingly with Paul Gilroy’s
explorations of “the image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in
motion . . . [which] focus[es] attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for
redemptive return to an African [or in this case English] homeland, on the circulation of
ideas and activists . . .” (4). That is, the ships that frame the narratives in both *Lionel
Lincoln* and *The Pilot* suggest that Cooper clearly conceived of American identity in
terms that were larger than the geographic borders of the new nation. *Lionel Lincoln*
begins and ends with a ship’s journey between England and America, but destabilizes the
Revolutionary binary by figuring the local geography of Boston as an ambivalent site of
conflict, rather than a patriotic stronghold. As Lionel’s ship comes into Boston harbor at
the opening of the novel local colonists and British soldiers gather to view the fleet.
Cooper writes: “In so large an assemblage, however, there were those excited by very
different feelings, and who were indulging in wishes directly opposite to each other” (9).

The three initial battles at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker-Hill that Cooper
depicts--praised by critics for their historical accuracy—explain the military conflict as a
result of British imperial hubris. Furthermore, through a discursive sleight of hand,
Cooper invests the local geography with a kind of agency in the defense against British aggression. The first skirmish begins because a British detachment slogs through a brutal twenty mile night march to confiscate an arms cache at Concord. On the way they encounter Massachusetts militiamen peacefully training at Lexington Green and fire upon the colonists slaughtering them: “Their [the British soldiers’] coarse jests, and taunting looks . . . together with the boastful expression of brutal triumph, which so many among them betrayed, exhibited the infallible evidence, that having tasted of blood, they were now ready, like tigers, to feed until they were glutted” (108). But Concord becomes an exact reversal, a “place of discord that they falsely call Concord” (116):

The effect of this prompt and spirited conduct on the part of the provincials produced a sudden alteration, not only in the aspect, but also in the proceedings of the troops. . . . for the first time, both officers and men seemed to recollect that they had six leagues to march through a country that hardly contained a friend. . . . The privates caught the infection from their officers, and Lionel saw, that in the place of the high and insulting confidence, with which the troops had wheeled into the streets of Concord, they left them, when the order was given to march, with faces bent anxiously on the surrounding heights, and with looks that bespoke a consciousness of the dangers that were likely to beset the long road which lay before them. (113)

Instead of crushing the will of the American opposition, the twenty mile march inverts at Concord, and the twenty miles back to Boston become a harrowing journey that, as it progresses, increasingly builds momentum for the colonial resistance: “the force of the assailants was increasing, both in numbers and in daring, at each step. On either side of the highway, along the skirts of every wood or orchard, in the open fields, and from every house, barn, or cover in sight, the flash of fire-arms was to be seen, while the shouts of the English grew, at each instant, feebler and less inspiriting” (115). At Bunker-Hill the Americans literally dig themselves into the hilltop forcing the British to suffer enormous
casualties to take the redoubt and then using the land to aid their escape: “The formation of the ground favored their retreat . . .” (188). Through the battle descriptions Cooper establishes the British as a professional army in the service of an imperial power, while the Americans are characterized through the familiar republican myth of “citizen soldiers,” heroic yeomanry who unify in the fight against organized colonial oppression.

But the gothic descriptions of Boston disturb the binary of the military conflict. The city’s labyrinthine streets and mixed architectural styles figure as metonyms for the suppressed Other that complicates the republican myth of unified resistance. When Lionel arrives in Boston he employs Job Pray to lead him to Madame Lechmere’s home, which initiates a labyrinthine descent through the “dark and crooked passage” (19) of both the city and his own confusing colonial heritage. Lionel’s memories of a childhood in Boston slowly return as Job takes him past the Province House, the seat of colonial power, and then past Faneuil Hall, which is the site of Boston’s famous town-meetings—“a crucible for mob politics” (Nash 18). Faneuil Hall, which stands on the waterfront, specifically connects Boston to the Atlantic network that England attempts to cut off, and Job says, “the Boston folks are not so dumb as to be cheated out of God’s water by acts of Parliament, while old Funnel [Faneuil] stands in the dock square” (23). Between these symbolic sites of colonial and anti-colonial political conflict stands an abandoned tea warehouse where Job and his mother Abigail live. Cooper takes pains to describe the gothic architecture of the strange triangular edifice: “its extremities were flanked by as many low hexagonal towers, which terminated, like the building itself, in high pointed roofs, tiled and capped with rude ornaments” (23-24).
In the end, the warehouse, not the Province House or Faneuil Hall, figures as Cooper’s site for narrative resolution, a detail that points to Cooper’s sense of a larger transnational complex for American identity, one that implies dynamics outside of the strictly political conflict of the Revolution. Once a storehouse for tea—a colonial symbol that Cooper fully exploits—the warehouse stands as an isolated and empty space. As Agnes Danforth (a distant cousin of Lionel and Cecil) explains when offered tea at Mrs. Lechmere’s home, “I know not how the subtle poison may operate on your English ladies, major Lincoln, but it is no difficult matter for an American girl to decline the use of a detestable herb, which is one, among many other, of the causes that is likely to involve her country and kindred in danger and strife” (38). Though Lionel stays with his great-aunt at the Lechmere House in a “scene of colonial splendor” (30) that Cooper details, the long, convoluted search for his origins ultimately takes him to the warehouse.

Because the warehouse, like all of Boston, is closed off from contact with the Atlantic network, it becomes a site where madness, imbecility, and disease converge in the narrative and symbolizes a stagnant Revolutionary disjuncture between England and America. Immediately after hearing the story at his mother’s gravesite, Lionel, Ralph, and Cecil return to the warehouse where they find Job Pray lying on the floor, badly beaten by a gang of troops from an Irish regiment; moreover, Job is dying from smallpox he has contracted in the pestilential atmosphere of besieged Boston. Smallpox causes the deaths of Sir Lionel’s wife and Job Pray, suggesting that the disease emerges as a contagion brought on by a stagnant and dysfunctional atmosphere, an atmosphere particularly suited to the gothic. Lionel’s mother contracts smallpox while she waits for Sir Lionel to settle legal claims back in England, “during the period when the war of ’56
was raging in its greatest violence” (55). Cooper creates a parallel between the aberrant atmosphere of the Seven Years War and its recurrence, a generation later, in the American Revolution. But the parallel also suggests that the origins of colonial unrest trace back to the “war of ’56.” Thus, in Lionel Lincoln Cooper uses the fairly common early republican trope of contagious disease as a metaphor for mass political discontent.

In Romances of the Republic Shirley Samuels traces the connections between Revolution and the rhetoric of disease or contagion as a practice that developed after the American Revolution: “The French Revolution and the plague equivalently represented threats to social order. Such a connection between plague and politics provides one indication of how Americans, and not merely conservative Federalists, began to abhor the revolutionary principles they had initially embraced” (29). Samuels specifically discusses the plague in Charles Brockden Brown’s gothic novel Arthur Mervyn (1798), but clearly Cooper builds upon the established trope. Contagious disease, like Revolutionary violence, has associations with Jacobinism and mob politics. Cooper displaces Revolutionary violence by making contagion an expression of an aberrant historical moment, a narrative vehicle for excluding Revolutionary violence through death. Besieged Boston marks a stagnant and contagious interlude in the history between England and America. When an Anglican minister tells Lionel that the smallpox epidemic came “from some emissaries sent into the town for that purpose, by the wicked devices of the rebels,” Lionel responds, “I have heard that each party accuses the other of resorting to these unjustifiable means of annoyance” (233). As with all the other events in the narrative, the epidemic emerges from a disrupted, abnormal atmosphere that lies between the opposing forces of imperial England and colonial America.
At the warehouse Abigail Pray confesses her own role in the lie that Madame Lechmere told to Lionel’s father (the father of her son Job as well). By including Abigail Pray, who is a Puritan serving woman, Cooper involves the Puritans as accomplices to the lie that leads to Ralph’s madness and its associations with Revolutionary violence. Lionel’s father, Ralph, the British aristocrat, produces an imbecilic bastard son through an improper union with a Puritan servant. Job is the first fruit of the union between England and America, but he is forgotten and cast aside as an excluded other. Abigail complies with Madame Lechmere’s lie because she seeks favor from the colonial aristocracy: “I was so vain as to hope, that, in time, justice and my boy, might plead with the father and seducer, and raise me to the envied station of her whom I hated [Lionel’s mother]” (354). Through the subaltern figure of Abigail Pray, Cooper allegorizes the complex colonial history of Boston, rightly suggesting that economic and social inequities also helped create Revolutionary violence in America.

Cooper carefully conflates violence, disease, and madness throughout the novel, but he also coordinates these with the historical progression explaining the Revolution. Lionel’s mother’s death and Ralph’s subsequent madness coincide with the origins of Revolutionary strife which Cooper traces to the period following the Seven Years War. Cooper contends that, in historical terms, a legal dispute precipitated the Revolution: “It was about this period that the contest for principle between the parliament of Great Britain, and the colonies of North America, commenced, that in time led to those important results which have established a new era in political liberty, and founded a mighty empire” (56-57). In 1832 Cooper adds a long note further explaining the disagreement:
The true nature of the political connection between England and America seems never to have been very distinctly understood. As each province had its own constitution, or charter, all of which were essentially republican, and several perfectly democratical, the only legitimate tie was the prerogative of the crown. . . . America never consented to put the power of the English aristocracy in the place of the prerogative. It is probable that neither hemisphere foresaw the result; but it is certain that an aristocracy, calling itself Parliament, arose on the ruins of the prerogative, while, in truth, the prerogative was the only legal tie between England and America. . . . He who carefully considers the allegiance of America, will see that it was encumbered with contradictions that, sooner or later, must have produced a crisis.” (57-58n)

Of course, Lionel Lincoln narrates the “crisis” that Cooper explains in the historical note. The British aristocracy and its colonial adherents illegally disrupt the terms of an established relationship between England and America. The genealogical narrative of the Lincoln family follows that disrupted relationship until its climactic moment in the warehouse when, almost simultaneously, Job expires, Ralph attacks Abigail Pray, and Lionel, about to strike the old man, is stopped by his wife’s words: “stay that unnatural hand! You raise it on thy father!” (355). Ralph’s keeper, who had been tracking him since he escaped the asylum in England, then appears, and Ralph is killed in the ensuing struggle while Lionel and the others watch in horror. By staying Lionel’s hand Cooper not only absolves him of Revolutionary violence, he also removes the suggestion of patricide from that violence. Revolutionary madness, like disease and imbecility [Job contacts smallpox by foolishly accepting food from an infected family], brings about its own demise and closure.

Cooper’s narrative conclusion synthesizes the seemingly incompatible associations of gothic and historical narratives. The events converge upon the abandoned tea warehouse in Boston on the eve of the Battle of Dorchester Heights (March 5, 1776), and this conjunction becomes critical as a means of locating Cooper’s chosen point of
origin for the Revolutionary break with the past. In the objective historical sense the Battle of Dorchester Heights marked Washington’s first victory of the war, though it was not a pitched battle. Americans secretly entrenched themselves again as they had on Bunker-hill [actually Breed’s-hill] throwing up mounds of earthen bunkers. Howe was forced to either fight another terrible battle or retreat from Boston. He chose the latter, evacuating on March 26, 1776. Cooper specifically develops the narrative around this event, investing it with an originary significance that certainly was not apparent at the time, but one that clearly suits Cooper’s purpose of displacing Revolutionary madness by making it something that preceded the purely rational Declaration of Independence. Furthermore, the climactic scene in the warehouse marks the genealogical culmination of the Lincoln family’s genetic aberrance.

More than a century before, the same “morbid sensibility” that Ralph and Lionel exhibit had prompted Sir Reginald Lincoln, upon his wife’s death, to become an “ascetic puritan” and emigrate to Massachusetts in “revolt at the impure practices of the Court of Charles.” Even then the trait “appeared to be a sort of heir-loom” in the “extremely ancient and wealthy family” (53). As with Ralph, the death of Sir Reginald’s wife creates a rupture that revives a dormant trait, and historical circumstances exacerbate the situation. Cooper genders Revolutionary madness as a latent male tendency that can be controlled by union with a faithful and supportive wife, but, once death ruptures the marital union, historical events can turn the morbid insane. Luckily for Lionel, Cecil survives, and they return to England, thus healing the initial rift. Cecil exerts “the gentle influence of her affection moulding and bending the feverish temperament of her husband
... [and] the heir-loom of the family, that distempered feeling so often mentioned, was forgotten, in the even tenor of their happiness” (364).

The deaths of Ralph and Job successfully exclude Revolutionary violence, but Cooper elides the present threat that violence might return by having Lionel forget the genetic family “heirloom.” Failed memory, then, figures as another form of narrative exclusion; Cooper controls the threat of return through a discursive leap that buries Revolutionary violence in the past, but failed memory also signifies a narrative rift that undermines resolution. The true threat of violence in Lionel Lincoln comes from the common people whose dormant anger erupts in the streets of Boston and at the Battle of Concord; thus, Cooper makes another discursive elision by employing the rhetoric of republican virtue to control any possible return of mob violence. Common farmers and tradesmen are transformed into a mythical heroic yeomanry that fights on principle. In The Rebels Lydia Maria Child performs a similar discursive and narrative elision, but from a feminine perspective. As in Lionel Lincoln, Boston’s local mob violence and general civil unrest frame the narrative, and much like Cooper, Child in the end contrives a resolution that falls back upon the rhetoric of republican virtue as a solution to the problem of continued violence.

The Rebels

The preface to Child’s novel The Rebels; or, Boston before the Revolution begins: “Nothing is more delightful to the human mind than to ascend from important results to their primitive causes” (xi). These words not only frame Child’s narrative but they also explain her historiographic act. Through a narrative she connects present America to its sources in the past. As her biographer Carolyn Karcher notes, Child timed the November
1825 publication of *The Rebels* “to coincide with the national jubilee” (41). This explains the logic of setting the narrative in Boston, which was celebrating the jubilee of the battles at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill, but it also speaks to America’s preoccupation with questions of origin. De Certeau writes:

> Historiography . . . has the qualities of grasping scriptural invention in its relation with the elements it inherits, of operating right where the given [American Revolutionary origins] must be transformed into a construct [narrative], of building representations with past materials, of being situated, finally, on this frontier of the present where, simultaneously, a past must be made from a tradition (by exclusion) . . . (6)

Child chooses to narrate Boston *before* the Revolution beginning with the Stamp Act riots of August 1765 and following through to the novel’s climactic resolution on the day of the Boston Massacre in March of 1770. On that day the young heroine, Lucretia Fitzherbert, discovers that she is not the rich colonial heiress that she was raised to be; instead, in a remarkable narrative reversal (and discursive elision), she discovers that she is actually Gertrude Wilson, a commoner, who decides to marry the simple republican hero Henry Osbourne. For Child, the “important results” of present-day America in 1825 trace back to the moment when Lucretia’s identity changes from colonial heiress to virtuous republican wife. The leap is astounding, and, as will be shown, most critics see the novel as flawed because of this and other narrative improbabilities. But I will argue that America makes a similarly improbable discursive leap from the reality of a violent and fragmentary colonial identity to the myth of a unified and virtuous republican citizenry following the Revolution. In both cases, Child’s narrative and the national one elide the threat of class-based mob violence by constructing a myth of virtue and unity—“a past . . . made from a tradition (by exclusion).” That Child chooses the period of civil unrest before the Revolution only reinforces the suggestion that America’s real cultural
concern in 1825 was suppressing the threat of popular democratic violence. To that extent *The Rebels* participates in a nationalist discourse that seeks to control any threat to federal hegemony, but as a woman who will soon become a strong and vocal advocate of causes that defend marginalized Americans—Indian rights, Abolitionism, the Women’s Movement—Lydia M. Child also constructs a narrative that destabilizes simplified stories of national origins.

The name Lucretia has profound implications for understanding the complexities of Child’s narrative of national origins. The rape of Lucretia, one of the foundational narratives of the Roman republic, tells the story of the chaste wife of Collatinus who, merely because of virtuous behavior, becomes the object of desire for Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the Roman king Lucius Tarquinius.66 While the Roman army besieges the nearby city of Ardea, hoping to plunder its wealth, Sextus returns to Rome and rapes Lucretia. The next day Lucretia summons her husband and father back to Rome, tells of the rape, swears them to vengeance, and kills herself in front of the men. Junius Brutus, one of the witnesses of the suicide, has her body carried through the streets, exposing the crime to the people of Rome, and then delivers “a bitter invective against the tyranny of the King, wherewith the people were so mov’d, that with one consent and a general acclamation the Tarquins were all exil’d, and the state government chang’d from kings to consuls” (“Argument” 43-47). The rhetorical associations between the early American republic and the Roman one have been documented exhaustively, but Child retells this myth from her own ambivalent present. The story of how a republic was formed when common citizens were roused to action by the silent body of a woman, who is the model of domestic virtue, and united in anger against a monarch who exploited their labor

66 Livy and Ovid both recount versions of the myth. I rely primarily on Livy’s version here.
becomes fragmented when placed within a colonial context. Rather than a single submissive female body that represents the foundation of the Roman empire, Child’s version depicts the paradox of American origins in Boston where the new nation is formed both from inherited colonial wealth and privilege and from colonial subjection. Furthermore, Child, like Eliza Cushing before her, resists representing the nation as a fully colonized and submissive female body.

Much as her earlier novel *Hobomok* leaves its reader with unsettling questions when it ends with the contrived resolution of a Native American willingly stepping aside from his marriage and child with a white woman and passing off into the West so that she can marry her first love, a white male, *The Rebels* ends with the high-spirited Lucretia, marrying and becoming the perfect model of simple republican domesticity. The final act seems contrived, not because it is improbable, but because it seems disconnected from a narrative that otherwise parallels the violence and tension leading up to the Revolution. The concluding scene leaps over the marriage and the Revolution to 1784 when the anxious heroine, “with her group of smiling cherubs” (245), greets her husband upon return from the war. Carolyn Karcher argues that this ending:

> Invokes the post-Revolutionary ideology that the historian Linda Kerber has dubbed “Republican motherhood.” This ideology dignified women’s role in the new order by endowing their domestic responsibilities with political significance, but it reserved the sphere of politics for men. Child’s endorsement of it marks the limits of the feminist consciousness she had attained by 1825. (45)

Karcher astutely notes Child’s present cultural limitations and their impact upon her ability to imagine a more suitable resolution, but the narrative that precedes this resolution suggests a deeply conflicted consciousness, one that makes the trite conclusion all the more jarring. Within the narrative, latent socio-cultural conflicts emerge at the
specific junctures where historical events intersect with the fictional plot, as when, for example, the Boston massacre is juxtaposed against Lucretia’s recognition scene.

Karcher and Kerber refer to what Ed White calls the “republican synthesis” or “megasynthesis,” the ideological elision through discourse—and through narrative--of the real, material violence and turmoil that occurred during (and after) the Revolution. Citing a long historiographic tradition that extends back to origins in post-Revolutionary Federalism, White states, “In short, the Federalists synthesized, at the discursive level, the conflicts and confusions of popular forces: what they could not solve socially or politically, they solved rhetorically. Federalism thus amounted not to a masking of reality with rhetoric . . . but to a systematizing of rhetoric and reality, as the concepts and practices of democracy were put into a more controlled, controllable, and controlling order” (9). Though White specifically focuses on eighteenth-century America, the argument has profound implications for understanding Child’s narrative reinterpretation of national origins. As White further argues, “American nationalism is inextricably tied to federalism . . . . [and] federalism is a movement of a long eighteenth century, a movement of colonial origins and a movement extending beyond the Revolution” (11). Child’s compromised resolution in The Rebels acquiesces to a dominant “republican synthesis” that colonizes the feminine voice by absorbing it as part of the project of nationalism, but her narrative resists that control by complicating and fragmenting the silent female body of the Lucretia myth into three separate female characters, each of which represents a different facet of America’s complex colonial situation.

In order to give agency to the female body and also represent colonial resistance, Child retells the myth, not as a rape, but rather as a romantic love triangle. Lucretia
Fitzherbert and her best friend Grace Osbourne fall in love with the handsome but unprincipled Frederic Somerville. An English soldier and nephew of Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson, Somerville is the quintessential metropolitan figure. He disgraces both Lucretia and Grace by secretly promising himself to Grace and then becoming formally engaged to Lucretia. Through Grace and Lucretia, Child allegorizes the complex and twisted imperial relationship between England and America. Lucretia, the allegorical representative of colonial wealth, who represents colonial wealth, has a politically arranged relationship with Somerville. She travels to England along with Somerville to become the heiress of her rich “Manilla uncle’s” fortune. While there, she meets Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, even Joshua Reynolds—who paints her portrait—and returns to Boston a “highly cultivated English heiress” (198). By contrast, Grace is the model of natural beauty and republican simplicity, but, though Somerville truly loves her, he betrays that love for fortune. Both women are enchanted by Somerville’s metropolitan elegance and style, reinforcing the ambivalent relationship between empire and colony, center and margin. Grace never reveals her shame and steadily withers until she dies; it is her submissive death and the popular reaction it evokes that parallels the Roman Lucretia’s:

[Grace’s] death excited universal interest . . . . The event no doubt produced much greater sensation on account of political fermentation. She whom they followed to the grave, was the only daughter of a man that had ever firmly vindicated the rights of America; and she had been cut down, in the full bloom of youth and beauty, by the cruelty of a haughty foreigner,--a pampered connexion of Hutchinson,--an insolent military oppressor. (224)

Grace’s death becomes a rallying point for the commoners of Boston, but the spirited Lucretia Fitzherbert, now a rich colonial heiress, refuses to sacrifice herself when she discover Somerville’s treachery. In a clear statement of colonial resistance and
feminist agency Lucretia waits until her wedding, which takes place at the Hutchinson mansion, and then publicly denounces Somerville, disgracing him before the altar.

Lucretia has been living with her guardians, Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson and his sister Miss Sandford, in the mansion, and when they demand that she apologize to Somerville and submit to his will, she chooses instead to leave for the republican simplicity of the Osbourne home. The climactic wedding scene illustrates Child’s own resistance to patriarchal authority. As Karcher notes, “Lucretia resembles her creator in so many ways that it is impossible not to take her for a self-portrait” (42). And Elleke Boehmer situates such feminist agency in the following way:

some [postcolonial] women writers have chosen to revise the family dramas that structure national narratives, including the male Bildungsroman and nationalist autobiography, by focusing on the roles and character of daughters. In particular, they have explored the daughter’s relationship to her immediate, father-led family, and to the patrilineal community of which it is a microcosm. They have dramatized her negotiated bid for selfhood and status within what might be called the national house, that is, within the inherited and correlated structures of both family and nation-state. (107)

By rejecting Hutchinson’s patriarchal authority and choosing to live with the fatherly republican Mr. Osbourne, Lucretia severs the colonial relationship between England and America, but her agency in the act—she tells no one of her plan to ruin the wedding—suggests Child’s own feminist resistance to the transfer of authority that marks the “republican synthesis.” Child dispenses with the British imperial ambitions that Somerville represents by having him resign his commission after the humiliating rejection at the wedding. He exiles himself to the South where he dies in Baltimore, having “fallen victim to his own fluctuating principles and misguided feelings” (226).67

67 In Livy’s version Sextus Tarquinius, also a man of “fluctuating principles and misguided feelings,” dies in exile murdered by those he had committed crimes against in the past.
Though she successfully severs English imperial ambition from the national narrative, Child is still left with the narrative problem of Lucretia’s ties to colonial wealth and British aristocracy; thus she further subdivides the character by drawing in the story of Gertrude Wilson, a story that implies an English Atlantic identity. Gertrude Wilson, the real Lucretia Fitzherbert, is raised a Catholic in French Canada—both children are born in Halifax, Nova Scotia. When she comes of age, she marries the heir of a miserly Bostonian, Edward Percival, and they settle in Canada. Gertrude and Edward Percival become the heirs of British colonial splendor, and in the end they return to England, as do Hutchinson and Miss Sandford. Even though they are portrayed as the epitome of romantic beauty and gallantry, Gertrude and Edward ultimately represent an “other” excluded from the “republican synthesis” that Child envisions through the union of Henry Osbourne and Lucretia / Gertrude. Lucretia’s final recognition and reversal suggests an anti-romance; rather than finding that she is a rich princess, she discovers that she is a commoner, but this also removes the corruption of colonial aristocracy from the myth of America’s lineage. Thus, Child tells a story of “Boston before the Revolution” that implicates all of the British empire. Moreover, as a story of identity, the narrative reveals an ambivalent process of extrication from colonial entanglements, ambivalent because it both acknowledges a cultural debt to the empire as the source of Lucretia’s refinement and education, while at the same time disconnecting her from an aristocratic lineage. From her present in 1825 Child constructs a national narrative that performs the paradox of America as both colonized and colonizer through Lucretia’s double identity. In her education and privileged colonial childhood, Lucretia represents a colonized figure whose impending marriage to Somerville would suggest a complete domination, avoided
only by the Revolution. In contrast, Child ultimately excludes the true Lucretia from the national narrative by representing her as Catholic and Canadian, mild exclusions, but ones that hint at the more severe colonizing ambitions and exclusions (Native and African Americans for example) that characterize America’s own national empire.

Molly, Mather, and the Act of Literary Decolonization

Lucretia’s true identity as Gertrude marks America’s own genealogy, which traces back to the bizarre witch figure, Molly Bradstreet. Molly, Lucretia’s real grandmother and the woman who switched her as a baby, signifies the unruly originary passions of America’s “lower orders.” Through “Molly the Witch” Child reinterprets the source of Revolutionary energy and the repression of its violence within the narrative. Her character marks the profound ambivalence and ambiguity that signify Child’s moment of breakage between past and present. Molly literally embodies the ambivalent rupture through her social, religious, and gendered ambiguity:

A tall athletic female . . . . Her masculine figure, of such uncommon height and rigid outline; the grey hair, that hung in confused masses about her haggard countenance, and the frenzied look of her large blue eyes, would have struck the stoutest heart with something like dread. (68)

Molly chooses to live as an alienated figure rather than submit to the social norms and expectations tied to her gender role. Unfortunately, there is little space for such defiance in either colonial or early republican America, hence Molly’s marginalized status.

Child’s Molly exists on the periphery; the common tropes of insanity and witchcraft explain her antisocial behavior, but they also marginalize her inchoate feminism. Though she admits that she has “been a poor, wronged, half crazed, and furious creature” (234), Molly never behaves insanely in the narrative, and on her deathbed she explains her actions. Her English husband left her for the daughter of a
Scotch nobleman, after which she “always had a wandering, restless spirit” (232).

Further on she states:

I learned the black art of a Scotch woman. I don’t know whether there was anything in it, but things would sometimes come to pass as my books foretold. There was nobody in the world to love me, and so I had a mind they should fear me; and it was pleasant enough to see, how strong as well as weak were slaves to my power. (233)

Molly asserts her independence by striking out on her own after being abandoned: she represents an alternate account of the early colonial relationship between England and America by symbolizing an early America that was forgotten and neglected by the metropolitan center.

Ultimately, witchcraft and insanity are poor translations of the primal fear that Molly evokes. She lives on the periphery of Boston society, and calls herself “an outcast in creation” (231), but in the narrative she marks the limits of colonial repression. As political tensions increase Molly becomes the voice of Boston’s popular mob. At the massacre she taunts the British soldiers and incites the mob, but Child carefully distinguishes Molly from the narrative’s other representation of a Boston commoner, John Dudley—the perfect colonial yeoman. Molly prophesies to the English soldiers: “Spill blood, red from the hearts of your brethren;--but do it at your peril. You’ll live to see it fearfully avenged,” but Dudley tells her, “Hush, woman,--hush, for Heaven’s sake, . . . there will be horrid work here, before the sun goes down” (229). Molly literally occupies the space between the mob and the soldiers at Child’s moment of origin for the American Revolution, but once the lines are drawn, she gives way to Dudley who represents the myth of America’s sturdy yeomanry acting upon principle rather than violent passion. After the massacre Henry Osbourne says, “The land is wide awake and
the good cause gains ground” (234-235). As he helps her Dudley too is wounded, but he survives. In contrast, Molly is told that “her life might possibly be saved,” but she responds, “It is better otherwise” (230). The contrast between Molly and John Dudley effectively separates the “republican synthesis” from violent Revolutionary origins, and Molly’s death is “better otherwise” only in the sense that it excludes the threat that she represents from the future nation.

Molly Bradstreet is a purely fictional creation by Child—no woman was killed in the Boston Massacre—but the name does combine two actual historical figures who achieved feminist breakthroughs. Molly Pitcher became famous for breaking the gender line in military conflict when she fought in the Revolutionary Battle of Monmouth, and of course, Anne Bradstreet was the first woman writer published in America, despite living under the strict gender constraints of early Puritan Boston. Such feminist associations mark an important strategy in The Rebels: Child clearly interweaves literary culture with the political, social, and religious issues that undergird the national narrative. As John Carlos Rowe asserts, “The history of literary culture in North America suggests an important continuity between colonial America and U.S. nationalism” (12). Child situates her narrative along the boundary that Rowe articulates, though at the time that complexity went unrecognized and subsequent critics have elided Child’s sophistication in favor of an essentialist version of American nationalism (much as they have with Cooper’s novels).

The Rebels, like many other marginalized historical novels in this era, was specifically criticized for its narrative failures. The North American Review writes:

The narrative is greatly deficient in simplicity and unity, and is not so much one story as a number of separate stories, not interwoven, but
loosely tied together. . . . We think it the more necessary to comment on this fault, because no point has been so much neglected, by the writers of historical romances, from the author of Waverley downwards, as the management of their narrative. . . . It would be easy . . . to speak of the difference between a regular and magnificent structure, and a confused pile of splendid materials, but we prefer submitting the question without argument to the taste of the public. (Gray 402)

Carolyn Karcher argues that the parallel historical and romance plots do not work because Child’s national allegory breaks down. She refers to the romance plot as “manifestly an inadequate vehicle. . . . Melodramatic and weakened by a profusion of implausible complications, her plot simply could not support the symbolism with which she had freighted it” (45). Karcher’s criticism bears ideological similarities to the objections of the *North American Review*. Only the terms change: where earlier critics objected to the work on the grounds of a romantic aestheticism, a lack of unity, Karcher objects on the basis of a failed national allegory. The plot is certainly filled with “implausible complications,” but these are rather a complex literary enactment of what the historian Gary Nash calls “the unruly birth of democracy and the struggle to create America.”68 Child’s allegory parallels the complications of America’s national identity formation, treating it as a process of internal civil conflict but in the context of a larger transatlantic network. As a result there is a need to recognize the very narrative threads that have either been elided by recent nationalist critics or discounted by earlier ones.

Child blurs the literary, cultural, and political boundaries of the novel’s supposedly hodge-podge construction by constructing a female coming-of-age narrative that inscribes a feminine voice not only within the nation but also within Anglophone literary history, an act that Boehmer sees as part of postcolonial women’s writing: “Postcolonial women writers have . . . confronted the symbolic inheritance that is the

68 This is the subtitle of Nash’s work *The Unknown American Revolution* (Viking, 2005).
peripheral figure of the postcolonial national daughter, whether child or adolescent, either as part of, or in addition to, adopting . . . writerly resistance strategies . . . . Their engagement with women’s national identity therefore emerges not only in the manifest content of their work, but also for example in their preoccupation with rewriting authoritative cultural texts” (106-107). Child not only draws upon the authority of the Roman mythology of Lucretia—a story that Shakespeare appropriates in *The Rape of Lucrece*—but she also incorporates a critical revision of Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, a seminal text of British literary imperialism. Child’s use of these texts employs the paradoxical framework that Paul Giles describes as “not simply an easy elision of the national into the transnational, but rather a consideration of various points of friction where these two discourses intersect. From this perspective, the cultures of Britain and America do not so much define themselves against each other as surreptitiously twist each other into strange, apparently unnatural forms” (14).

*The Rape of the Lock* of course tells the story of Belinda, a vain belle who lives a frivolous existence in London’s wealthy metropolitan society, until an “Adventurous Baron” takes one of her beautiful tresses. The act is as meaningless, shallow, and unprincipled as the society where it occurs, which is exactly what Pope satirizes, but in Child’s hands the allusive structure becomes an echo of the inherent cultural and ideological conflict between “colonizer and colonized.” Somerville, like the Baron, is not so much a villain as a product of an unprincipled and rapacious society. After Grace’s death, Lucretia’s finds a copy of *The Rape of the Lock* that Somerville had read

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69 Edward Watts uses these terms to describe the transitional status of America during the Early Republican era as the country wrestled with a number of conflicts typically associated with modern postcolonial discourse: “Perhaps the nation’s constant anxiety over the issue of its colonial origins is the hallmark of the postcolonial condition” (2). Watts’ thesis is particularly appropriate for discussing Child’s work because so many of her themes address issues of inequality and exploitation.
to them and then secretly given to Grace. Along with the book is a letter to Somerville;

Grace writes:

> I do not think you were to me a hypocrite. I do believe you loved me. But it is not strange that I should have been forgotten in the midst of a busy, tempting world. . . . I love the books you have read; and for your sake, their ideas have become my own. I cannot, if I would, escape from your image. It is seated by our fireside,—it is walking in our paths,—it is stamped on every page I open. (223)

For Child, Pope’s work not only symbolizes Somerville’s shallow behavior, but also the complicated transnational relationship between England and America and its shared literary heritage. Grace admits that Somerville’s “ideas have become . . . [her] own” specifically through the vehicle of literature. Grace’s letter exemplifies what Rowe describes as “an intellectual tradition of cultural colonization by means of writing and reading” (13). His own voice is interwoven with Pope’s poem, and his image is “stamped on every page”: “All the passages he admired were marked with a pencil, his observations written in the margin . . .” (79). Within the historical context of the narrative Grace lives in colonized America, but Child writes almost sixty years later in a post-Revolutionary—yet not necessarily postcolonial—world. Edward Watts argues:

> Clearly, there was a feeling even in the nineteenth century that Americans and their writing were still colonial, unable to express local experience and obedient to the commands of the centralized metropolis in London. . . . For something to be post-colonial, some process of decolonization must have occurred . . . . Integral to the process of decolonizing American writing, ironically, was the attempted retention of borrowed and misapplied British literary conventions by the republican elite. (5-6)

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70 John Neal rails against American writers, especially Cooper, in a review for *Blackwood’s Magazine*, “Late American Books,” [XVIII (September 1825): 316-334] for these exact reasons. With typical bombast, he writes: “We did hope, . . . that some native, bold writer of the woods; a powerful, huge barbarian, without fear, and without reproach, would rise up to the call [for an original American production]; come forth in his might; and, with a great regard for historical truth, give out a volume or two, worthy, in some degree, . . . We did hope for all this; and will continue to hope for it, though we see little to encourage us” (190-191).
Child’s use of allusive structures in an American setting marks a kind of present rupture in the historical narrative that signifies the “decolonizing” that Watts refers to. Furthermore, she consciously applies these “conventions” with great skill, not for the purposes of slavish imitation, but as a way of articulating the historical process of disentangling an American identity from its inherited traditions. The intersections or borders between Child’s historical narrative and the allusive narrative structures that she interweaves mark sites of contestation that have long been criticized as either “misapplied” or “implausible complications.” Yet, these sites are almost invariably connected to the significant historical events in the narrative, in other words, connected to Child’s allegorical figurations of national identity formation.

On the night of September 9, 1765, all of the main characters take a sailing cruise around Boston harbor. The date coincides with the eve of stamped paper arriving in Boston, which would spur violence throughout the colonies; it also parallels a similar boat ride up the Thames in Pope’s poem. What appears to be another example of poor narrative construction represents a nexus of literary, political, religious, and gender conflicts that foreground the complexities of the relationship between England and America. The characters engage in an extended debate, and the ambivalent center of the discussion is the prominent colonial figure, Mather Byles. Byles becomes a key figure in the narrative because he embodies the complex cultural associations of colonial Boston. A Loyalist and Old Light Calvinist (Cotton Mather’s nephew), Byles was pastor of the Hollis Street Congregational Church in Boston for forty years until he was deposed during the Revolution for his fiercely conservative Toryism. Karcher sees Byles as one-dimensional:
[He] serves as an excuse for Child to deliver another blistering attack on the creed of her youth. . . . Child uses Miss Sandford’s exchanges with Byles to discredit the patriarchal ideology she associates with Calvinist doctrine and Tory politics. Far from being innately superior, she shows, men like the Reverend Mr. Byles maintain their power simply by disparaging women and denying them the right to participate in intellectual discourse” (41).

But what is left out of this criticism is the explicit literary complication that Byles’s relationship to Pope signifies. Paul Giles writes that Byles was “an American follower of Pope . . . one of the best known and most widely recognized writers in colonial New England” (29), a colonial fame that quickly faded after the Revolution.71 Byles, and other Tory poets from colonial America, were neglected in American literary history. Nationalist critics, working from a position of American exceptionalism, often ignored or marginalized Byles’s literary contributions as nothing more than weak echoes of Augustan figures like Pope and Isaac Watts—both correspondents with Byles. For nationalist critics, Byles figures as part of the pre-Revolutionary world that the new nation breaks away from, suggesting that the Revolution marked a clean break from the past--a binary opposition: old colonial order versus new national one. Karcher’s description of Byles seems to share in that binary representation by characterizing Byles as a straw man for Child’s attacks on the hierarchies of colonial society. Yet, as Giles further notes, both Pope and Byles stand in complex, even paradoxical, relation to the political and religious authority of their time:

Pope and Byles shared a comic sensibility, an iconoclastic tendency to puncture pomposity, which placed them in an oblique relation to the civic authorities of their times. Just as the sophisticated sensibility of Pope contrived a structure of duplicity where he could affiliate himself and disaffiliate himself from English society simultaneously, so Byles reflected the celebrated features of Pope in an effort to reposition the

71 See Arthur Wentworth Hamilton Eaton The Famous Mather Byles and C. Lennart Carlson’s Introduction to Poems on Several Occasions.
American cultural landscape within a larger sphere of transatlantic influence. (39)

Child acknowledges the continuing entanglements of the colonial past both through the textual references to Pope and through the complex characterization of Byles. She figures Byles—apparently quite accurately according to his biographers—as both a deeply satiric literary wit and sincerely devout religious man. The issues that Byles argues on the boat ride all are ones that the Revolution fails to resolve and they remain unresolved in Child’s present.

For all his play on words and misogynistic scorn of Miss Sandford, Child portrays Byles as sincerely religious and twice has the boat’s pilot mention that the Reverend Byles is a “good man.” More than Hutchinson and Miss Sandford who both represent self-serving allegiance to a colonial system, Byles articulates the ideology behind the old colonial order in New England and its sources in Old Light Calvinism. That is, though external events caused by British political oppression ultimately produce Revolutionary violence, Child traces the origins of ideological difference back to a fundamental crux in Calvinism, the issue of predestination. For strict Calvinists, like the Puritans that Byles descends from, salvation can only be achieved through God’s grace.

It is Byle’s play on the name “Grace [Osbourne]” that shifts the conversation from romance to religion and the distinction between Old and New Light Calvinism. The boat’s uneducated pilot, a New Light, argues for salvation through “the light of good works” (82). Byles rejects the egalitarian New Light argument and suggests that it stems from scriptural misinterpretation by the unlearned. The pilot says, “I don’t understand what you mean . . . but I will never sell my reason to any man, because he happens to be more larnt than I am” (82). Religious disputation quickly leads to issues of democracy,
but Byles uses Calvinist rhetoric to reinforce the hierarchical logic that undergirds colonialism: “[Y]ou are made for your place, and I for mine. Some must think and some must labor; some must rule, and some must be ruled. For instance, young men, Governors Bernard and Hutchinson are born to command, and you are born to obey” (82). This of course inflames the young patriots aboard, Henry Osbourne and Doctor Willard. Willard says, “What difference is between the duke and I? No more than between two bricks, all made of one clay; only it may be one is placed on the top of a turret, the other in the bottom of a well, by mere chance” (82). For Willard, “chance,” not fate, governs one’s birth. The young patriot marks the shift from the old ideology of acceptance to a new one of independence and equality. Byles says, “O dear, . . . I am in a sad predicament, between new lights and new fires” (82). But despite the historical context, such debates continue well beyond the Revolution. For example, as Child wrote Jacksonian democrats were railing against John Quincy Adams for “stealing” the 1824 election from Jackson. Adams personified the New England intellectual and became a figure of popular mistrust of the federal government as elitist and disconnected from the people’s will (Jackson had won the popular vote decisively, but lost the election when Henry Clay threw his electoral votes to Adams.).

Byles’ between-ness extends beyond the political and religious disputation on the boat. Paul Giles argues that “Byles’s texts mediate the aesthetics and problematics of imperialism in a more ingenious, provocative manner than . . . simple degeneration [from Augustan models like Pope] would imply” (31). Child fully grasps this complexity and paradox, the sense that Byles complicates clear distinctions between Old and New worlds. In a literary historical sense Byles stands between Pope and Child as a colonial
connector who signifies America’s complicated literary heritage and further reveals the process of American decolonization that Child’s work participates in. By using Byles as the figurative origin of ideological conflict in the narrative, Child reinscribes Revolutionary history, intimately involving literary culture as part of national origins; moreover, Child inscribes herself within a complex literary tradition that suggests an American identity that extends well beyond the geographic and temporal borders of the Revolution—in fact, well into the present.

Yet what Child cannot resolve, and what ultimately must be sublimated by the narrative, is the historical reality of mob violence that exists “beneath” the literary, religious, political, and gender conflicts that Byles and others articulate. Lucretia’s shift in identity at the end of the narrative makes her a commoner who supports the Revolutionary cause, rather than an ideologue who discusses it from above. Discursively speaking, this is an important strategy because it transfers her colonial identity to a republican one and elides the violence of Revolution that Molly Bradstreet represents. Livy’s version of the Lucretia myth maintains the class distinction between her aristocratic body and the common masses who unite against the king, but Child attempts to “synthesize” Lucretia’s republican virtue with the Revolutionary actions of the common people in Boston. Lucretia’s metamorphosis into Gertrude Wilson elides the class differences that complicate the local Revolutionary history in Boston, differences that make mob violence a larger problem than the political or ideological break between England and America. Gary Nash describes the eruption of Stamp Act violence in Boston as follows:

Behind every swing of the ax and every hurled stone, behind every shattered crystal goblet and splintered mahogany chair, lay the fury of a
plain Bostonian who had read or heard the repeated references to impoverished people as “rabble” and to Boston’s popular caucus, led by Samuel Adams, as a “herd of fools, tools, and sycophants.” The mobbish attackers were those who had suffered economic hardship while others fattened their purses. (48-49)

Class disparities in Revolutionary Boston highlight a distinction between the world of privilege enjoyed by colonial aristocrats like Hutchinson and the common artisans who made up the “popular caucus.” Much as Cooper had in *Lionel Lincoln*, Child constructs a version of Revolutionary origins that begins with passionate violence bordering on insanity, but she resolves the plot in a way that eliminates that irrational violence.

Beginning with the Stamp Act riots of 1765 Child distinguishes mob violence in Boston from genuine patriotism, and further argues that colonial leaders like Hutchinson and Bernard deliberately conflate the two, in effect displacing her own discursive elision of mob violence upon Boston’s colonial aristocracy: “To further their tyrannical design of obtaining military assistance from England, the two governors [Hutchinson and Bernard] chose to represent the affair [riots] as the spontaneous movement of the whole town, suggested and aided by its best and most influential citizens” (45). Child then constructs a famous speech that she attributes to James Otis as a patriotic response to the colonial rhetoric. Furthermore, she has Samuel Adams escort Hutchinson’s family from the mansion before it is razed by the mob. Adams tells the crowd, “My friends . . . remember nothing is to be gained by violence; much by calm and dignified firmness” (37), and he later says, “This is licentiousness, not liberty. This is no way to redress our wrongs” (40).

As Molly falls—“her bright red cardinal fluttering at her side, like the outspread banner

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72 The speech at the White Horse tavern was long attributed to Otis and reprinted in children’s history books throughout the nineteenth century. See Karcher (47). Child’s literary portraits actually became the most famous elements of the novel. *The North American Review* praises her sermon by George Whitefield as “executed with great felicity, and is in exact keeping with the character of that eloquent and untutored enthusiast” (403).
of a fallen chieftain” (229)—Child resituates the Revolution as Cooper had done with the exclusionary deaths of Job Pray and Lionel’s father, but though the arbitrary breakages attempt to remove the threat of violence and democratic upheaval, exclusion “comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies” (de Certeau 4). In the end both Cooper and Child invariably complicate national identity. By narrating Boston’s local story they reconstruct an American nation that extends well beyond the boundaries of the Revolution.
Introduction

As meditations on the origins of American identity, *Lionel Lincoln* and *The Rebels* both move from the broadly representative geographic spaces of land and sea in *Saratoga* and *The Pilot* to the labyrinthine logic of the colonial seaport. Boston barely conceals the political discontent of the democratic masses that concerns both Cooper and Child in their narratives. Clearly, democratic unrest threatens America as it begins to celebrate the national jubilee in 1825, and *Frederic de Algeroy* (1825) and *Yorktown* (1826) respond to that threat. In both narratives the discursive authority of the “republican synthesis”—which since the Revolution held a national narrative together through a myth that Americans were simple industrious yeomen—is discarded in favor of a return to myths of colonial aristocracy. Despite the insistent rhetoric of national unity throughout the jubilee celebrations, however, ambivalence about the Revolutionary legacy persisted, and thus, Lafayette became an ironic figure for both progressive and regressive versions of history.

In August of 1824 the Marquis de Lafayette arrived in New York to begin a year-long tour through all twenty-four U.S. states. The tour launched the national jubilee celebrations that continued through 1826, and Lafayette encountered unprecedented crowds at every stop he made. The jubilee was of course an important part of the nation’s reckoning with the Revolution, but Lafayette embodies that; he becomes a kind of material representation of America’s problematic attempt to achieve closure on the
Revolution. The sheer volume of newspaper and magazine coverage attests to the tour’s cultural significance for the nation, but novelists also responded with historical narratives celebrating Lafayette. Invariably these narratives address his significance in what Lloyd Kramer refers to as “the dialectics of identity” (12). Kramer explains Lafayette as “mediating cross-cultural experience in the American Revolution” (13) between Old and New Worlds and again fifty years later when he “confirmed the self-perceptions of early American nationalists and the dialectical exchanges that affirmed America’s own emerging cultural identity” (14). In this chapter I want to interrogate the “politics of historical interpretation,” to use Hayden White’s phrase, that lies beneath Kramer’s definition of Lafayette’s cultural significance. Was American identity really the product of “dialectical exchange”?

Clearly, Lafayette recalled the heroism and glorious sacrifice that defined Revolutionary representation in the early republic, a past era that figured quite differently from depictions of the present republic as a bustling, industrious, and thriving new society. In his speeches Lafayette repeatedly mentions the tremendous growth that the new republic has made since the Revolution, and Kramer bases his discussion upon this foundation of historical progressivism, which is quite right if one relies, as he does, upon the republican rhetoric celebrating the tour. For example, in January 1825 the North American Review writes:

> We rejoice, too, no less in the effect which this visit of General Lafayette is producing upon us as a nation. It is doing much to unite us. It has brought those together, who have been separated by long lives of political animosity. It helps to break down the great boundaries and landmarks of party. It makes a holiday of kind and generous feelings in the hearts of the multitudes that throng his way, as he moves in triumphal procession from city to city. It turns the whole people from the bustle and divisions of our

73 For contemporary newspaper accounts of Lafayette’s tour see Edgar Ewing Brandon
wearisome elections, the contests of the senate house, and the troubles and bitterness of our manifold political dissensions; and instead of all this, carries us back to that great period in our history about which opinions have long been tranquil and settled. (179)

This description of Lafayette’s tour captures an important paradox: it clearly asserts the rhetoric of dialectical exchange and progress that Kramer describes, while simultaneously affirming the present reality of “political dissensions” and disunity. Lafayette stands between these two conflicting versions of the American present, versions that deconstruct American identity by resolving into a stasis that hearkens back to the past rather than synthesizing a future nation. Two historical narratives written in response to the fervor generated by Lafayette’s tour, and specifically dedicated to him, Frederic de Algeroy by Giles Gazer (pseud.) (1825) and Yorktown (1826) by Eliza Cushing perform the complicated deconstructing of American identity that the North American Review suggests. Instead of affirming a new national identity built upon the heroic sacrifices of the Revolutionary heroes, these narratives portray the Revolution as the product of a historically aberrant generation. Both novels purge the Revolution from history and resolve the narratives not through historical progression but through return to a mythical colonial order that preceded Revolutionary strife and the greedy, immoral, and imperialistic generation that produced it.

The Hero of Camden Plains and the Ascendance of Aristocratic Virtue

Though the pseudonymous Giles Gazer, esq., remains unknown and the author never published anything else under this name, the authorial voice of the preface clearly establishes a present threat to national identity by suggesting that democratic masses are fraudulently usurping America’s true aristocratic identity, and the author specifically cites Lafayette as the center for such a destabilization. The preface begins:
In dedicating a publication like the following to the brightest luminary of our age, the author feels considerably embarrassed, and his situation very singular. But influenced by the desire of linking two memorable titles anonymously together, and of gratifying a commendable vanity in himself, he has ventured to attempt it. . . . It is well known that our venerable hero’s title is used by a very many of our population as a vehicle of fraud and imposition. This the author heartily reprobates, and will endeavour, in the subjoined dialogue, which took place between two revolutionary heroes when the arrival of our general was first made known, to expose.

(v)

Without the slightest tone of irony, the author “reprobates” those individuals who misrepresent Lafayette’s “title,” while he (or she) simultaneously writes under an anonymous pseudonym. Furthermore, the author never directly names either Lafayette or the other “memorable title,” General Jean “Baron” de Kalb, the actual Revolutionary hero that Frederic de Algeroy represents. Nonetheless, the discursive strategy is clear; the author associates both Lafayette and de Kalb with their aristocratic “titles.” In a further irony, but one that effectively illustrates America’s confused relationship with Old World aristocracy, neither Lafayette nor de Kalb (who was not born a nobleman, though Americans called him “Baron”) ever stressed an aristocratic lineage. For example, Lafayette preferred to be called “General,” rather than Marquis, while Americans nearly always used the latter title. Kramer notes this irony as “Lafayette’s achievement”:

He understood, practiced, and praised the American republican manner—and did so with the dignity of a European aristocrat. . . . Americans believed that their new nation was based on the morally superior principles of republicanism, and they had found a marquis to prove it!

(22).

The embedded and paradoxical discursive conflict over how to properly represent Lafayette translates to America’s own cultural conflict over national identity, and the subjoined preface dialogue fleshes this out as a present class conflict.74 When one of the

74 In Critical Fictions Joseph Fichtelberg explains this conflict in terms of the relation between sentimental fiction and the American market revolution. He analyzes the market as a latent drive beneath the popular
Revolutionary soldiers claim that he will fire his old musket to celebrate Lafayette’s arrival, the other cautions him against excessive enthusiasm:

> I have no doubt that the venerable hero’s name will be employed by the avaricious as the sanction for deceptions upon the unsuspecting community—that mantled beneath his ever-to-be-reverenced *title*, will be concealed the mechanic’s deceit and the tradesman’s extortion. Every public defrauder and private impostor will assume a license for their injustice by usurping his name, and each exorbitant demand will be readily overlooked by being luxuriantly gilded with the patriot’s signature.

(italics mine vii)

Gazer’s subsequent narrative, then, responds specifically to the present threat that elitist reverence for a colonial aristocracy will be lost in the transition to a new national era dominated by “mechanics” and “tradesmen.” At the opening of *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said writes: “Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms . . .” (3). *Frederic de Algeroy* “appeals to the past” through a narrative that reinscribes the Revolution. It re-appropriates history to make a discursive shift away from the myth of the Revolution as a “people’s war” attempting to diffuse further consolidation of democratic power in America. 

In *Frederic de Algeroy*, unlike previous Revolutionary historical novels that emphasize the war as a point of origin for the new nation, the author attempts to establish continuity between the colonial past and America’s new national identity. The narrative

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rhetoric of sentiment in American literature. Though Fichtelberg does not directly address historical fictions, what he calls “the invisible but heavy hand of the market” (2) clearly threatens American identity—as it is ironically represented through a foreign “other”—in the exchange between the two old soldiers. Merchandise celebrating Lafayette’s tour and trading upon his name was enormously popular among American consumers.
ensconces republican ideals in the rhetoric of romance and the conventions of chivalry, decidedly breaking from the typical “republican synthesis” of America as a nation of small farmers. Frederick de Algeroy is a “baron” and a “knight of the royal order of military merit” (13) who, like his historical counterpart, left wealth and station back in Europe (what is now modern Germany) to become a Major-General in the Continental army. But the problem of the Revolution as a revolt against Old World corruption remains, and thus the author must resituate American origins in a distant colonial past and elide the Revolutionary break by subordinating its historical rupture. The author accomplishes that discursive strategy partly by having fictional romance dominate the narrative. Mildly put, in *Frederic de Algeroy* historical probability is cast aside until the Battle of Camden, an event that marks the ambivalent intersection between Revolutionary history and the fictional romance, and as such signifies the author’s chosen point of historical reinterpretation.

De Kalb died at the Battle of Camden heroically fighting alongside his veteran Continental division, but the author blatantly misrepresents the historical significance of the event. The Americans lost at Camden (August 16, 1780), though shortly thereafter the war in the South turned and Cornwallis was defeated at Yorktown. Nonetheless, the author writes, “the ensuing day was fixed upon to determine the fate of the two armies, and perhaps a great part of the United States of America” (209). Camden Plains is significant for Gazer’s thesis because it reinforces the logic of the preface. The Americans lost when common militiamen abandoned the fight, leaving de Kalb’s forces surrounded by seasoned British troops. General Horatio Gates, along with “the cowardly wretches [the militia] fled with precipitancy” (213); the British flanked de Kalb’s division
and promptly crushed them. In the novel de Algeroy is carried from the battlefield to the tent of Sir Ralph Bourke, the fictional, villainous, British commander, where the final resolution occurs.

The name de Algeroy has obvious anagrammatic associations with “allegory”; and thus the final scene in the tent reveals the author’s strange refiguring of history. *Frederic de Algeroy* explains the Revolution as the consequence of immoral British imperialism that began after the Seven Years War. As Edward Watts notes, “the writings of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and a host of their British contemporaries bear witness to a radical transformation in the form of British imperial dominion from one of benign neglect to one of exploitation after the victory over the French in both Europe and North America” (7). In the novel the British are described as “a foreign oppressor whose troops were enfeebled by effeminacy and luxury, and discontented by tyranny and arrogance” (210), and Sir Ralph Bourke represents that imperialist excess as the villainous rival of de Algeroy.

Back in England Bourke imprisons his own father and starves him in order to usurp the family fortune; thus, he marks the aberrance of the new imperialistic generation, which has broken from the “benign neglect” of the former one. The father escapes and comes to America, much like Lionel Lincoln’s, but contrary to Cooper’s narrative, this father’s return brings a restoration of order. The old man had fought heroically in the Seven Years War, but now lives disguised as an “anchorite” on a nearby mountain. Twice in the narrative the father—not de Algeroy—rescues de Algeroy’s wife Evelina from Sir Ralph’s clutches. The fact is significant because de Algeroy, as a Revolutionary hero, is not the corrective for imperial abuses; rather, the father, a figure
who represents a past colonial order, sets things aright. In other words, *Frederic de Algeroy*, through its allegory, elides the Revolution as a significant break with the past. The Revolution does not establish a new order; rather, Sir Ralph does through an immoral act of usurpation (even parricide, though it is unsuccessful) that occurs years before. Furthermore, Revolutionary violence does not resolve imperialistic abuses; instead, a return of the past intervenes.

Narrative conflict centers on Evelina, a fully submissive female who represents the silent imperial subject. Though she loves de Algeroy, Bourke kidnaps and tries to seduce her with his colonial riches. In a significant allegorical scene after the kidnapping, Bourke decorates his headquarters, a decaying mansion, with objects of colonial wealth and decadence:

> All that extravagance, luxury, or pride might desire, or wealth and distinction procure, was lavished in the adornment and furnishing of the magnificent apartments which the lovely Evelina was to inhabit and transcend. But all the grandeur of profuse decoration, and the pompous display of inexhaustible riches was not . . . sufficient to hide the foulness of its possessor’s heart, and the depravity of his infernal mind; or capable of influencing the innocent bosom of the amiable Evelina to depart from the path of rectitude, or to soil her own untainted fame, and her husband’s unspotted honour. (185)

At the very moment before Bourke rapes Evelina, his father suddenly reappears: “before him stood the shroudless apparition of his father—of that father whom he had starved in confinement!” (191). Bourke faints at this ghostly return of a repressed figure from the past, and the old man brings Evelina back to de Algeroy. But British troops kidnap her again, and immediately after the battle at Camden Plains Bourke brings the nearly lifeless de Algeroy to his tent as a witness to the mock marriage between himself and Evelina. Thus the final scene in the tent allegorically enacts an immoral union.
between imperial England and colonial America, and the old disguised anchorite is
brought in to perform the ceremony. Bourke says, “Now . . . will I lead to the legal
marriage altar, my lawful bride; and he [the old anchorite, Bourke’s father] who ties the
indissoluble knot which binds us reciprocally, will likewise dissolve the union—the
illegal union between my prisoner [de Algeroy] and Evelina” (231-232). Because
Evelina’s Loyalist brother had promised her to Bourke—and the brother is at this point
dead—Bourke invokes his “legal” right as guardian of Evelina. But the climactic scene
quickly unravels when the disguised father again reveals himself. In the ensuing shock
and scuffle Bourke is killed by a former lover, Adeline Belmett, disguised as a British
soldier, an American Loyalist that he ruins and then rejects for Evelina.

In the end Frederic de Algeroy negates a new post-Revolutionary American
identity through an allegory that establishes oppositions only to cancel one another out.
Bourke’s immorality is negated by Frederic’s Old World chivalry, and Evelina’s virtue is
negated by Adeline’s vice (Adeline attempts to seduce Frederic and colludes with Bourke
to ruin Evelina so that she can have de Algeroy to herself.). Only Evelina and the
anchorite survive: she enters a convent and he dies shortly after the peace is signed. The
brief narrative operates quite differently from previous Revolutionary novels that assert
republican difference by marking a distinctive historical break, usually along generational
lines, one that pushes the colonial era into a distant past. Instead, Frederic de Algeroy
evokes that past order as a response to the present threat of democratic disorder, not as a
harmless celebration of the good old days or the pastness of the past, but as a political
statement that affirms the need for colonial social hierarchies within the new nation.
As part of a discursive conflict over how to represent American identity, the dedication to Lafayette signifies the ambivalence of Frederic de Algeroy’s political statement. For the author, Lafayette’s return to America negates present differences and reaffirms the myth of aristocratic heroism. The tour takes place during the tumultuous presidential election of 1824, an election that for the first time allowed a majority of the states (eighteen of twenty-four) to democratically determine the presidential electors by popular vote. Andrew Jackson won that vote handily, confirming growing fears among America’s intellectual and economic elite that they were losing control of the nation. Ultimately, Adams won the presidency when Clay threw his electoral votes behind him, but the people had spoken. Adams only lasted one term, and his presidency was at best ineffectual (Jackson triumphed easily in 1828).

Yorktown and the Problem of Identity

While Frederic de Algeroy uses Lafayette as a figure of continuity between colonial aristocracy and a new national hierarchy, Eliza Cushing takes a different tack in addressing the very same issues a year later. Her novel Yorktown, An Historical Romance (1826) focuses upon the final battle of the Revolution, a kind of narrative capstone to her other Revolutionary novel Saratoga (1824), which marked the first major American victory of the war. By building a narrative around the last battle of the Revolution, Cushing specifically chooses historical resolution as her subject. Yorktown emphasizes the pastness of the past and thus a break between that former era and the present one, but as will be shown, despite an implied Revolutionary break between past and present, that arbitrary boundary collapses under the weight of present American
cultural concerns. And, once again, Lafayette figures at the center of this collapsed boundary.

De Certeau writes that the relation between past and present in historiography “itself becomes the site of scientific operation. But it is a site whose mutations, like a buoy floating on the sea, follow the more vast movements of societies, their economic and political revolutions, complex networks of influence among generations or classes, and so forth” (37). Though Cushing chooses a historic event that symbolizes closure, Yorktown becomes a site of “mutations” that expose issues that the Revolution failed to resolve and others that the successor generation attempts to exclude from the national narrative. The Jubilee celebrations that Lafayette’s tour initiates fully participate in the doubleness that ultimately deconstructs the Revolution as a point of origin for American national identity. Thus, though the tour begins a national commemoration of Revolutionary origins, an act of remembrance that looks back on the nation’s origins, the event also signifies a new age in American history, a generational succession.

On July 4, 1826 both Thomas Jefferson and John Adams died within hours of one another, further emphasizing for many Americans the country’s break with the Revolutionary past. Len Travers argues that July Fourth celebrations thereafter take on different associations altogether:

The wide acceptance of this epochal interpretation of two deaths indicates a general contemporary awareness that a new phase of American society and political culture had indeed begun. From the 1820s onward, Independence Day activities acquired a wealth of new associations resulting from the rapid democratization of American society. (220) Sacvan Bercovitch writes: “In 1826, with the death of Jefferson and John Adams, the Revolution passed officially into the possession of a new generation. It was an uneasy succession” (172). It certainly was, perhaps in large part because the rhetoric of progress
was becoming increasingly difficult to match with present dissensions and disunities in the republic. *Yorktown* struggles with many of the issues that made succession so complex. In the end, the legacy of a hierarchical plantation society unravels and deconstructs the republican myth of a unified nation. The typical binaries of historical romance collapse in *Yorktown*, and instead of narrative resolution that asserts a myth of American progress, national identity is negated.

*Yorktown*, like *Saratoga* before it, omits a preface, but in lieu of that Cushing offers an extended dedication to Lafayette that covers a full page. In formal terms, the omitted preface destabilizes the subsequent historical narrative. It removes the relation that a preface establishes between the writer’s present and the historical subject from a chosen past, but Cushing compromises by inscribing herself in the liminal space of the dedication. She calls Lafayette “the venerated hero of two generations,” which, though true, also further negates the distinction between past and present.75 Finally, after praising Lafayette’s patriotism, Cushing describes the two volumes as “descriptive of events, supposed to have occurred near the memorable closing scene of that glorious drama, in which he [Lafayette] bore so honourable and conspicuous a part . . . [and] respectfully inscribed by an individual of the nation in whose defence he lent the voluntary aid of a brave arm, and a chivalrous spirit.” Thus, she imbricates fictional and historical events and “inscribe[s]” herself within “the nation,” both acts that, as will be shown, paradoxically assert and then negate individual and national identities.

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75 Andrew Burstein uses the generational connection in a comparative sense. Cushing’s mother was the novelist Hannah Foster, whose novel *The Coquette* was one of the most popular works of the Revolutionary generation. Burstein compares the mother and daughter’s works in an attempt to illustrate the literary and cultural differences between the two generations. But Burstein’s criticism is firmly period-based and progressivist; he views Cushing as clearly influenced by Byronic Romanticism, and ignores a number of the complications that defy such categorizations.
Yorktown’s Virginia setting echoes an internal opposition between North and South, or nation and South that geographically situates the narrative in a suggestive middle space between past and present social orders. The young heroine Helen Leslie and her twin brother Edward have been raised at Heathland, a nearby plantation that has been wrongfully (though legally) usurped by their villainous uncle Colonel Walstein. Edward escapes from his cruel guardian by joining the patriot cause, but Helen, as a young woman, is bound to her legal protector. The legally binding relationship between Helen and Walstein becomes the primary conflict in Yorktown and reinforces questions of “domestic dependence,” slavery, and paternal authority. Yorktown registers ambivalence about the South, both by questioning the paternalistic social order of plantation society and by developing a narrative that specifically destabilizes paternal authority. In a discussion of Crevecouer’s Letters from an American Farmer, Jennifer Rae Greeson argues that the South figures as a binary opposition to the new nation, a rhetorical agent of decolonization that signifies America’s transition from colony to nation:

The nation-South rhetorical structure provides a tantalizing glimpse of a triangulated definition of postcolonial nationhood, in which the United States positioned itself as a third term distinct from both metropolitan London and its still-colonial South. To examine how the nation-South imaginative construct in American print culture facilitated the cultural passage of the United States from colony into nation, then is to suggest the importance of region—intra-national or transnational—as a term in the study of geography, representation, and power. (105)

Cushing complicates Greeson’s assertion that the US “positioned itself as a third term” in the early republic, through a narrative that is anything but “distinct” about national identity. The southern setting creates ambiguity, suggesting that American identity does not define itself against the colonial South—the old binary logic; rather, it embraces the very ambivalence and contradiction of the middle space between colonial dependence
and democratic independence. By focusing on Helen’s deeply conflicted, dependent status, Cushing’s narrative seems to question whether a “third term” exists at all.

Speaking of transvestism—an issue that surfaces in many different forms in the novel—Marjorie Garber writes

> The “third” is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis . . . But what is crucial here—and I can hardly underscore this strongly enough—is that the “third term” is not a term. . . . The “third” is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge.

Garber’s quote exactly captures the sense that all of *Yorktown* takes place in a liminal zone that perhaps best reflects American identity in Cushing’s present. There are no simple oppositions: the southern setting, and furthermore, the integral role of slave characters in the narrative problematize a stable version of national identity and “question the idea of one.”

Because their own dependent status parallels Helen’s, the slave characters in *Yorktown* are torn between allegiance to Walstein and love for Helen and Edward, and thus they exemplify the problem of authority in the narrative. Slaves intervene at key narrative moments, not as agents of disruption, but as liminal figures who stand on the boundary between chaos and social order. Timna, Helen’s personal slave, provides access across legal and social boundaries by literally figuring as a key holder in a number of crucial scenes. When Walstein, a Loyalist, forbids Helen from seeing the wounded Frenchman, Louis St. Olmar—her love interest—Timna fights another slave whom Walstein has posted before the door. Helen enters the cottage while Timna struggles with Rose, the other slave. She tells Rose that Walstein will not harm her because “she was compelled to submit and allowed neither voice nor agency in the affair” (1: 259), a
curious echo of Helen’s own predicament as a young woman legally bound to the same cruel guardian. When Helen discovers through another slave, Cato, that Walstein plans to marry her off to a British colonel, she says “I will defeat all his [Walstein’s] plans, thanks to the fidelity of his trusty Cato, who has given me the key to his designs” (1:229).

Timna quite literally holds “the key” at two other important junctures in the narrative, symbolically introducing the threat of violence in each case and suggesting that slavery is a source of violence and disrupted union. When Helen secretly tries to marry her love St. Olmar, unbeknownst to Walstein, Timna mistakenly leaves a door unlocked which permits the strange figure Maude Mansel to enter and take Helen captive. The narrator says that Timna “felt herself the cause of all the misfortunes of the evening” (2:39), but the kidnapping also figures as a disruption of paternal succession. Helen would have made the generational transition from Walstein to St. Olmar. In historical national terms, the transition would signify a smooth succession from “illegal” colonial oppression to the chosen paternal guardianship of the new nation (a fine distinction, and as will be shown, a problematic one at best). St. Olmar even notes, “I shall soon embrace you, and once within my arms, they shall never yield you more to the power of any other guardian, than one whom your heart approves” (1:271). Nina Baym refers to this as the “conservative” plot version in Revolutionary historical novels. Yet, Baym’s definition reveals just how much Cushing’s plot resists nationalist simplifications and the degree to which Maude’s intervention—through a threshold that Timna controls—disrupts the allegorical binary:

The paternal figure, much more villainous than in the liberal plots, undermines the Enlightenment trust in universal reason and natural benevolence on which progressivist history depended. Having no power that can move this kind of father, the daughter subsides into Old World
passivity and waits for her rebel-lover to rescue her from the clutches of Old World tyranny. Rescue means captivity, and captivity is indeed the motif of Old World women’s historical fiction, as it is of New World women’s captivity narratives. The despotic father’s authority is to be overturned only by violence, and hence, only by sons. . . . [C]onservatives imply that the ideology of the republic would be fatally compromised by such a reconciliation [with the Old World, as in “liberal” plots]. . . . Conservative novels argue against the establishment of close ties to any monarchy. (171)

But Cushing’s novel most certainly does establish “close ties” with the Old World and its aristocratic social order; furthermore, *Yorktown* marginalizes and attempts to seal off the very Revolutionary violence that Maude Mansel represents.

In one of the final scenes of the novel Maude locks herself in a bedroom with the body of her son who has been killed at Yorktown. The act symbolically closes out the violence of revolution. Maude demands that she alone can perform the funeral rites for her son, though Helen is “shocked at the idea of a mother’s performing such a painful office . . . [and wants] to leave this sad and mournful task to Timna” (2: 244), an allegorical suggestion that Helen, as the representation of a new national order, would prefer to leave slavery behind with the excluded violence of Revolution. But the end of the Revolution neither ends nor contains slavery, and thus Maude must perform that ritual closure that Helen would prefer from slaves. The next morning the room remains “securely locked . . . and when, as a last resort, it was determined to force the door open, Timna produced a key which suited the lock, and gave them admittance without further difficulty” (2: 251). In symbolic terms, Timna, the slave, still holds the key to a world that exposes the violent forces that disrupt union. Inside the room the Revolution is figuratively dead. Maude’s son, Rupert, lies properly dressed for burial, while Maude
lies on the floor in bloody clothes, a suicide by overdose of laudanum: “she died as she had lived, the miserable victim of passion” (2: 252).

Yet, slaves remain as an unresolved Revolutionary issue. Most early historical novelists avoid the problem that slavery poses by either excluding slave characters altogether or allying them with Loyalist colonial figures (as Cooper often does). But Cushing’s slaves actively participate in the discursive strategy of return or restoration of an old colonial order. Much like Frederic de Algeroy, Cushing suggests that British imperial greed after the Seven Years War causes Revolutionary violence. Walstein, a German by birth, serves with the English in the Seven Years War along with Major Leslie, Helen and Edward’s father, and then returns with him to Virginia. He marries Major Leslie’s sister and thereafter gradually usurps control of the family plantation, disrupting the paternal descent that should fall to Edward and Helen. When Timna compares Walstein as a master to Helen and Edward she states, “Ah, Missy, Cato never forget the hundred lashes Massa Walstein give him, and all for nothing . . . but he love you and Massa Edward, and glad to serve you both” (1: 229). Timna’s words, once again, reinforce an ambivalent association between slavery and Helen’s domestic dependence, and Helen’s response further illustrates the Revolutionary paradox that Cushing elides:

“Let him [Cato] be faithful, then, . . . and he shall never have cause to complain of cruelty or injustice. The time will come when my dear brother may assume the guardianship of his own slaves; and then, if under such a master, they prove treacherous or dishonest, I scarce know what punishment will be greater than their deserts. Edward was right to break from his thralldom . . . and, would to heaven, I had been born his twin brother, that with him I might have burst these galling shackles, which I am still constrained to wear. Alas! Unfortunate sex! Gifted with souls as lofty and aspiring as any which animate the lordly form of man; possessed of heart, alive to every tender and exalted sentiment, and of spirits that can
endure and dare what sterner man will often shrink from, yet limited to a narrow and subordinate sphere, trammeled by arbitrary custom, and scarcely permitted even the privilege of an independent word or thought!” (1: 229-230)

In one of the ironies of a novel that otherwise confounds gender boundaries and resists unjust paternalistic authority, Helen falls back upon the ideology of separate spheres and associates enslavement with her lamented fate as a woman. The Revolutionary break from “thralldom” is permissible for men, but not for women or slaves. In *To Wake the Nations*, Eric J. Sundquist argues, “the problem of slavery impinged upon all others [in the literary, political, and social documents of the antebellum], producing a national ideology riddled with ambiguities and tension” (2). For Cushing those ambiguities and tensions almost always return as problems of gender confusion; thus the narrative indirectly responds to the problem of “thralldom” by opening what Garber calls “a space of opportunity” that intervenes through the liminal boundary between the genders.

**Problems of Identity: The Twins and Maude Mansel**

Helen and Edward Leslie are identical twins, and from the outset of the narrative Cushing utilizes their identical appearance as a figurative vehicle. Their doubleness ironically negates difference, not simply in terms of gender, but also in the larger cultural and historical categories that Cushing dissolves by constructing a national narrative that reasserts a colonial social order. By deliberately confusing gender assumptions Cushing articulates an overall identity crisis in American culture and specifically uses transvestism as a vehicle for exploring that crisis. Garber explains transvestism as a “category crisis” that “is not the exception, but rather the ground of culture itself” (16), a
definition that succinctly captures Cushing’s usage with Helen and Edward, and as will be shown, with Maude as well:

By “category crisis” I mean a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another. . . . The binarism male/female . . . is itself put in question or under erasure in transvestism, and a transvestite figure, or a transvestite mode, will always function as a sign of overdetermination—a mechanism of displacement from one blurred boundary to another. (16) (italics mine)

From the novel’s opening scene when St. Olmar saves both Edward and Helen from drowning in the James, the two characters become almost interchangeable. Walstein says to Helen, “but for your feminine attire, I could almost fancy I beheld your graceless brother here before me” (1: 123), and Helen claims that she and Edward are “one in heart, soul, and sentiment” (1: 143). When Edward is captured as a spy and awaiting his death sentence, Helen visits him. He looks “like a terrified girl” (1: 139), and she remarks, “I see I am the firmer of the two, and I must play the part of comforter, though I have been used only like a petted child . . .” (1: 140). Edward resists when Helen asks him to change clothes with her, but she says, do not “think yourself . . . so stern a warrior that a woman’s cap and apron may not transform you to as frail a thing as I am” (1:144). Rather than incipient feminism, gender convergence in the narrative signifies an inchoate national identity. Helen and Edward embody the temporal and spatial limbo of the Revolution and Southern plantation society. Much like Cushing herself as she writes in 1826, Helen and Edward (and St. Olmar) have inherited the limbo they inhabit from the previous generation, and the new generation cannot assume its identity until the aberrations of the past are resolved.
Most critics suggest that the Revolution resolves the inequities of colonialism and serves as a break with the past that allows for a new republican identity; thus, Andrew Burstein, one of the few to discuss *Yorktown*, argues:

National independence is a prize to be won by relying on those positive qualities—virtue and valor—that either male or female can demonstrate. Helen and America both take part in an active contest against the harassment of the invader/usurper; Helen and America alike must outwit British and Tory machinations. But as strong and determined as she may be, and despite her declaration of independence from the false guardian (mirroring America’s Declaration of Independence from the false political parent), Helen, in the end, remains a prize to be won. . . . While womanhood triumphs, it does so without winning political equality. (79)

It also ends without true independence: Helen marries St. Olmar and they return to his paternal estates in France, and Edward goes there with them until he later chooses to returns to his own paternal estate in Virginia. Burstein’s reading of Helen assumes the centrality of the Revolutionary break, but Cushing’s narrative instead isolates and de-centers the event so as to minimize the violent rupture. The twins’ doubleness and blurred gender boundaries open a space for Cushing to explore present unresolved cultural conflicts, but that doubleness also has the rational function of explaining American identity as a shared transnational heritage. After the marital union, Helen, Edward, and Louis “for many years divided their time” (2: 255) between America and France. The Leslies are the final product of the entire aristocratic colonial American heritage, with English, French, and even reference to a Spanish element in their past.

Cushing sets the “rational” doubleness of Helen and Edward against the unnatural transvestism and doubleness of Maude Mansel. Maude signifies the Revolution as a kind of historical aberration; her transvestism “indicates a category crisis elsewhere, an irresolvable conflict or epistemological crux that destabilizes comfortable binarity, and
displaces the resulting discomfort onto a figure that already inhabits, indeed incarnates, the margin” (Garber 17). Maude first appears, covered in blood, after fighting in a skirmish against the British. Cushing never wastes an opportunity to describe her frightening androgyny: she is alternately a “beldame,” a “hag,” a “crone,” a “witch,” but also a “spectre,” a “figure whose habiliments, half feminine, and half warlike, gave a singular and grotesque air to the person of the wearer” (1:81). In battle she “appeared everywhere, raging like a fierce Bellona amid the sanguinary strife” (1: 86-87). While fighting alongside the Americans, she wears “the garb of a soldier, and is fiercer than the fiercest in our ranks” (1: 220). Maude’s double nature then marks the crisis of the Revolution and treats its violence as an unnatural “other;” her duality is not male/female, but rather female/fiend. Thus, when the British colonel Clifford asks her, “Woman or fiend, which am I to call you?” she responds, “I answer to the name of either, and sometimes do the work of both” (1: 90).

Andrew Burstein rightly connects Maude with Deborah Sampson, an actual historical figure who fought in the Continental army; her story was popularized by Herman Mann in The Female Review (1797). In Mann’s version, Sampson fights alongside Lafayette at Yorktown (though Burstein contends that this this was historically incorrect). She conceals her gender by binding her breasts, but after the war marries and has children. Burstein calls Maude a “perverted ‘Deborah Sampson’ . . . a mutation rather than a woman. . . . [who] lives on as a freakish reconstitution of her former self, so as to make the life of her seducer miserable” (78). Yet Maude is much more than a “ruined woman,” the conventional exemplar from a seduction plot: Maude’s marginal status reflects that of the actual Deborah Sampson who after the war was forced by
poverty to perform a “review” where she told her gender-crossing story. Sandra Gustafson argues that Sampson “presented her life story as the site of an ongoing battle over gender and class identities in the early republic” (382). Her liminal status “exposed the inadequacy of the distinct gendered languages of nationalism that emerged during the post-Revolutionary period, revealing their inability to account for her wartime experiences. . . . [She] eluded conventional categories . . .” (385). Both Sampson and Maude then signify what Marjorie Garber calls “the crisis of categories” (17). While Sampson’s crisis was primarily economic (she sought a pension for her service) and a violated the republican ideology of separate spheres, Cushing’s Maude suggests the crisis of national identity and the threat of a return of Revolutionary violence. Maude becomes the primary site of exclusion in the narrative and the force that destabilizes all binary oppositions.

By taking Helen captive at the wedding, Maude intervenes between opposing paternal guardians. She disrupts Helen’s passage from the tyranny of Walstein to the kind paternalism that Louis St. Olmar (an acronym for love, “l’amor76”) represents. In the historical allegory, then, Maude, like the Revolution, intervenes between America’s colonial status and the new republican union that Helen’s subsequent marriage represents, but not as an axis or hinge between two epochs. Maude symbolizes the Revolution as historical rupture, a repressed figure who holds both the secrets of Walstein’s criminal past and also those of St. Olmar’s mysterious origins (He is a foundling, taken in after a shipwreck off the French coast.), and that ambivalence places Maude on the very boundary that Cushing seeks to erase through the novel’s resolution.

76 See Burstein (75) who notes the acronym.
Closing the Revolution: Opening the Nation

The final narrative scene takes place around Maude’s son Rupert’s deathbed. He, Edward, and St. Olmar are all part of the force that takes a British redoubt alongside Lafayette causing the final surrender. Cushing juxtaposes the historical description of the Yorktown surrender—where the British band played “The World Turned Upside Down”—with Maude’s confession of the secret history of Walstein and St. Olmar. Thus, the formal representation of Revolutionary closure is set contrapuntally against its fictional representation. Yet the two negate, rather than reinforce one another, leaving Maude as a remainder.

Cushing at first restates the formal myth of the Revolution as the heroic overthrow of a colonial oppressor, one that establishes Enlightenment principles of liberty and human equality. She describes the surrender as a day which sealed the liberties for which they had contended and secured those rights and privileges, which have made this land great among the nations of the earth; an asylum for the oppressed; the chosen abode of peace, prosperity, and happiness . . . (2: 188)

Yet the fictional narrative that follows the surrender describes a death, not a national birth. As Helen, Edward, and St. Olmar stand around Rupert’s deathbed, Maude appears like a ghost: “The tout ensemble of her figure was ghastly and revolting, as though it had just burst the cerements of the grave, and left its unquiet resting place, to stand among the living, and appall them with its spectral appearance” (2: 200). She confesses her own involvement in a story that marginalizes the significance of the Revolution by locating its origins in the malicious and unprincipled actions of her own previous generation. That is, Maude tells a story of imperialistic greed that began some twenty years earlier in the aftermath of the Seven Years War, when Walstein returned to Virginia with Helen and
Edward’s father, Major Leslie, after serving with him in Quebec. At Quebec, St. Olmar’s father, a French officer, saves Major Leslie from being tomahawked by an Indian, and he also goes to Virginia after the war. Cushing’s fictional history then brings together all of the colonial powers in America, and further represents their conflicts as a struggle for control of a woman. Walstein and St. Olmar’s father become rivals for Major Leslie’s sister, Isabelle, but she “rejected both. Her heart was already buried in the grave of an earlier lover” (2: 221). The “earlier lover” and the name Isabelle (from Queen Isabella) both suggest Spain’s role in colonial America’s history. When Isabelle finally marries the Frenchman and becomes pregnant, he must return to France to settle his affairs (much like Lionel Lincoln’s father in Cooper’s novel). While he is away Walstein attempts to rape Isabelle and drives her insane. She disappears and dies giving birth to St. Olmar at Maude’s nearby cottage. Walstein then marries the younger Leslie sister and becomes the uncle of Helen and Edward.

Maude’s secret history figures the story of colonial America as a submissive female body exploited and colonized by white male Europeans. As Shirley Samuels describes in Romances of the Republic, “gender implicates . . . nation in signifying relations of power” (12), and this fact becomes especially important within the context of the novel’s final recognition scene where St. Olmar’s true father (who turns out to be the same man who raised the child after the shipwreck) returns and finds that his son’s chosen love Helen is identical to his dead wife, her aunt, Isabelle:

As he looked, his gaze became more rapt and eager; the tide of time rolled back, and the delusion was complete. The deep blue eye, . . . that finely rounded form, whose graceful undulations seemed moulded by the hand of symmetry; all—all were her’s, who first awoke his heart to love, and whose image, as vivid and as fresh as when he first beheld her, was deep enshrined within his soul. But now he gazed upon her living semblance;
and, as the gush of youthful feeling flowed upon his heart, he stretched his arms towards her, while his lips unconsciously, and with the deep toned energy of passion, murmured the name of Isabelle! Helen drew back, distressed and embarrassed by the emotion she was sensible of having excited . . . (2:240-241)

Cushing’s final act of doubling or twinning between Isabelle and Helen—and thus between generations--fully collapses the boundary between past and present, causing the submissive and colonized female subject, Isabelle, to return as the new national identity, Helen. What had been a “brief ill-fated union” (2: 239) for the father must now become a stable union for the son, but Cushing offers little beyond sentimental rhetoric to suggest that any fundamental social order has changed in the transition from colonial to national identity. The Count gives his blessing: “joining her hand with that of his son, he pressed them fervently between his own” (2: 241). Cushing elides the Revolution through Maude’s death, and further, erases the historical significance of the event by recreating a nearly identical social order to the pre-Revolutionary one. In effect, the same gender relations, “signifying relations of power,” remain, and Helen becomes what both Isabelle and Maude had been, a colonized figure. The marital union with St. Olmar avoids the issue of feminine agency by resorting to the familiar discursive strategy of “republican womanhood and separate spheres” (Gustafson 398).

Deaths bring symbolic closure to the Revolutionary narrative, but the internalized inequities of the new nation manage to surface in the most minor details of the conclusion. Even as Cushing describes the happy union of Louis St. Olmar and Helen Leslie, suggestive class issues relating to paternal titles must be resolved, issues that effectively erase a democratic American identity. First, Cushing notes that Louis relinquishes the name of St. Olmar in favor of his father’s original family name, St.
Desmond, “the world.” Such a switch appears to further emphasize the romantic union with Helen, whose name clearly has classical resonance, and also reinforces the transnational aspects of American identity. Yet, the narrative ends on a disturbingly strong paternal and aristocratic note, restoring a pre-Revolutionary, colonial social order that had been ruptured by a social “other” in the form of Maude.

Conclusion

Though neither Frederic de Algeroy nor Yorktown directly involves Lafayette in the narrative, his ambivalent presence is felt in both. As the last surviving general from the Revolution, he outwardly suggests closure and breakage between a former era and the present. The common masses who came to see him in 1824-1825 celebrated his republican heroism and his still firm opposition to inequities of class, gender, and race. Nonetheless, both historical narratives assert an alternate version of the general as an aristocratic hero, subordinating and suppressing democratic expressions of nationalism. By the time of the jubilee America had long been engaged in a process of political compromise on issues of social inequity. The very problems that had been represented as colonial evils, foreign to America’s republican ideals during the Revolution were now absorbed, internalized, and elided.

Lafayette then suggests an internal rupture, not a “dialectical exchange.” His liminal status as both foreign “other” and quintessential American straddles the boundary between outside and inside and makes him a figure of America’s own incomplete identity. Lafayette, like the characters of rupture and return in Frederic de Algeroy and Yorktown (and those in all of the historical narratives addressed in this dissertation), embodies what Homi Bhabha refers to as “cultural difference”:
a form of juxtaposition or contradiction that resists the teleology of dialectical sublation. Cultural difference does not simply represent the contention between oppositional contents or antagonistic traditions of cultural value. Cultural difference intrudes into the process of cultural judgment . . . (312-313)

Edward Watts argues: “there is testimony from both the early republic and its contemporary students that the years following the Revolution witnessed an effort to retain the imperialist cultural institutions of the colonial epoch” (4), and these cultural institutions, which not only included slavery but also an aristocratic tradition, specifically permitted the unresolved social inequities of the Revolution to continue. Both Frederick de Algeroy and Yorktown utilize chivalric romance as a politically conservative mode that suppresses democratic expression, but one that is also an excellent representation of “the homogeneous empty time [that] is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation” (Anderson 26). In the end, the Revolutionary succession that marks the era of the national jubilee signifies a generational rupture or rift that permits the historical displacement and marginalization of the Revolution. In Frederic de Algeroy and Yorktown romance returns where once the discourse of Enlightenment rationalism prevailed and its discursive effect elides the transition from colony to nation-state.
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