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JACOB RIVERS
University of South Carolina - Columbia

Johnson Jones Hooper's *Dog and Gun*: A Forgotten Sporting Classic

TO SCHOLARS OF THE LITERATURE OF THE EARLY AMERICAN SOUTH, THE name of Johnson Jones Hooper is synonymous with that of his most famous imaginative creation, the resourceful Captain Simon Suggs, a picaresque rogue whose unselfconscious moral vacuity has delighted reading audiences for well over a century and a half. So successful had Hooper been in capturing the universal traits of the trickster and confidence man through Suggs's brilliantly understated characterization and so well had his outlandish schemes for self-aggrandizement taken hold on his contemporary readers' imaginations that Simon Suggs, the fictional character, often usurped and replaced the identity of his creator in the public's consciousness. As a struggling young author and newspaper editor on the Alabama frontier, Hooper welcomed the fame and notoriety despite the confusion of identity it entailed, for it opened doors for him as an author and as an editor that none of his other efforts ever would. The great success of the first, 1845 edition of *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosa Volunteers*, was followed by eleven more reprintings in as many years, validating Hooper's artistic achievement and suggesting the enduring appeal of his genius and creativity. Based largely on his success in satirizing human greed and deceit through Suggs and his all-too-deserving victims, Hooper achieved an ascendancy in the art of comic portrayal that has earned him a prominent position among of the major Southwestern humorists.

But Hooper's versatility as a gifted sporting writer is so entirely eclipsed by his fame as a humorist that few know anything about his sporting and nature writing at all. As a result, his considerable talents in this important subgenre have heretofore been virtually ignored, almost as if his biographers and analysts have feared that acknowledging his intimate familiarity with the arts of the field might somehow detract from his stature as an artist. Moreover, because his single book-length contribution to the genre did not appear until 1856, late in his career and just before the fire-eating sectionalism which would soon consume all of his authorial energies, *Dog and Gun* is often treated as the belated

afterthought of a once-gifted writer who had squandered his best talents in the political skirmishes that so often attracted his pen. However, in view of the many sporting sketches that Hooper published, primarily in William T. Porter's *Spirit of the Times*, and considering the changes they reveal in Hooper's maturing emphasis on ethical sportsmanship and the natural history of the game indigenous to his region, it would seem that instead of viewing *Dog and Gun* reductively as a poor excuse for the artistic brilliance that created Simon Suggs, it is more profitable to consider the volume as a kind of culmination of Hooper's sincere commitment to a sporting ethos that paralleled and complemented his career as an editor and humorist. What *Dog and Gun* reveals more than anything else about its gifted author is that he passionately endorsed proper sporting etiquette as the best way that a sensitive intellect could demonstrate both his love for the excitement of the chase and his respect for the game and the natural world of which it formed a part. Perhaps sensing better than many of his contemporaries the all-consuming nature of the bitter struggle that lay ahead, Hooper found himself unwilling to allow so important a part of his life as the magical world of the Alabama countryside and the sporting adventures he had enjoyed there to slip into oblivion without hastily pulling together a book that called upon its readers to approach the natural world and the arts of the field with respect, reverence, and awe. It had taken Hooper most of his adult life to arrive at this high level of involvement with the land and the game, a reverential approach to the natural world that in his youth had simply formed a convenient backdrop for his satire.

In regard to the responsible sporting ethos that clearly informs the intent and purpose of *Dog and Gun*, Hooper's mature philosophy did not represent an isolated call for moral and environmental responsibility. Quite the contrary, it signaled instead his full participation in the continuing tradition of British and American writers for whom proper sporting etiquette was a manifestation of their admiration and respect for the natural world. The major tenets of Hooper's admirable code of sporting conduct had begun to appear long before in such British sporting periodicals as *Bell's Life* (the prototype for Porter's *Spirit of the Times*), *Blackwood's*, *London Sporting Magazine*, *London Sporting Review*, and *Pierce Egan's Book of Sports*.¹ Porter frequently reprinted articles from these and other periodicals in early numbers of the *Spirit*,

¹For a discussion of the English sporting tradition, see Blair 13-24.

a practice which soon inspired American authors to accept his open invitation to contributors. Moreover, the formalized rules of this gentlemanly kind of environmental good citizenship also informed such widely-read manuals as Peter Hawker's *Instructions to Young Sportsmen* (1833) and Henry William Herbert's *Field Sports in the United States, and the British Provinces of America* (1848). Perhaps as a gesture of respect and deference to these earlier writers, Hooper is often eager in *Dog and Gun* to demonstrate his knowledge of and subscription to proper British sporting etiquette and to show how American sportsmen like himself and his contributors had already internalized its many ethical prescriptions. In doing so, he once again followed a previously established tradition. Ten years earlier, Porter had set the precedent with an American edition of Hawker's *Instructions* (1846), retaining most of what Hawker had to say about the equipment, technique, and etiquette of upland and wildfowl shooting, but replacing the sections on primarily English species with chapters on American game such as bear, buffalo, and antelope (Cox). Although Porter admired Hawker and his *Instructions* inordinately, he was convinced that America offered to the well-heeled hunter and fisherman sporting opportunities that were far superior those available in either Europe or India.

While there is ample evidence that English books like Herbert's and Hawker's and the reprinted articles in the *Spirit's* earliest numbers prompted American sportsmen to pattern their own adventures afield after their British counterparts, the distinctly aristocratic and gentlemanly tone of the Americanized sketches also owed a great deal to the influence of Charles Fenton Mercer Noland, the earliest and most prolific of the *Spirit's* American contributors.² Noland led the way for a host of others who imitated both his refined diction and his narrative strategy of framing his stories so that a secondary, less-than-genteel narrator could express sentiments and address topics that the persona of the author himself would disdain to mention. Among Noland's best-known imitators are noted Southwestern humorists Thomas Bangs Thorpe and George Washington Harris, both of whom contributed non-humorous sporting sketches to Porter's magazine. As one of the *Spirit's* regular readers and contributors, Hooper also followed Noland's early lead by adopting a refined and formal diction for his serious sporting sketches. Moreover, as a dedicated sportsman whose access to

²For recent views on Noland's art, see Caron, Fienberg, Wimsatt, and Williams.

the world of published sporting literature would have been assured by his network of wide-ranging political and editorial interests, Hooper would have had unlimited opportunities to read and to study both the style and the content of the best sporting narratives of his day. Perhaps just as importantly, Hooper could also have found models for the environmental conservatism we find in *Dog and Gun* in early novels about the American frontier. For one example, in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823), a novel that severely criticizes the decimation of natural resources by a village of materialistic and profit-minded townspeople, Cooper contrasts Leatherstocking's conservationist views and his reverence for the natural world with the blunt utilitarianism of his neighbors. In Chapter XXII, Cooper depicts Natty's scathing criticism when the townspeople engage in the wholesale slaughter of the wild pigeons, and in Chapters XXIII and XXIV, their wasteful netting of the lake's bass again prompts the old hunter's bitterest denunciations. While I have no evidence that Hooper read and later adapted these powerful indictments of waste into his own writing, they do bear obvious similarities to the environmental ethos that we find in *Dog and Gun*. Moreover, they show that at least one major American novelist of the period had not only recognized the evils of environmental exploitation, he had also selected the figure of an ethical and principled sportsman to express his conservationist values. Perhaps without intending to, and long before the English model of proper sporting etiquette had become widely popular with American hunters and fishermen, Cooper's characterization reveals that both ethical sportsmanship and environmental responsibility stem from a reverence and a respect for Nature.

I do not know exactly when Hooper first began to adopt the formal code of proper English sportsmanship and its integral component of environmental sensitivity. Instead of an abrupt, epiphany-like transformation, his conversion was likely an evolving process that moved gradually through its stages as he became increasingly interested in the game and the natural world. However, judging from the first appearance of his serious sporting sketches in the *Spirit of the Times* ("Game in Alabama: Suggestions to Sportsmen" 16 July 1853), the late date of Porter's messages to him concerning the purchase of a custom shotgun from New York gunsmith Patrick Mullin ("To the Contributors" 24 Sept 1853), and the first publication date of *Dog and Gun* (1856), it

seems unlikely that Hooper had enjoyed either the means or the opportunity to learn how to appreciate the inherent value of proper sporting etiquette until fairly late in his career. It was therefore not until long after he had firmly established himself as a gifted humorist and newspaper editor in frontier Alabama that he decided to bring out a serious manual on Southern field sports, a book that differed markedly in both tone and substance from almost all of his earlier writing. By the time that *Dog and Gun* was first published as a monograph in December of 1856, Hooper's fame as a humorist and wry political satirist had reached national, even international, proportions, yet little if any of his enviable reputation as a writer was based on his familiarity with the arts of the field. Nevertheless, *Dog and Gun* sold well from the start, but after the eighth edition (1879), Hooper's final, slender volume virtually disappeared for more than a century. Fortunately for literary historians and other scholars concerned with the cultural life of the antebellum South, the University of Alabama Press rescued Hooper's book from its nearly total obscurity by publishing an accurate, affordable, facsimile reprinting of the Orange and Judd 1856 edition that once again gives *Dog and Gun* at least something of the widespread availability it formerly enjoyed during the nineteenth century.³

In view of Hooper's tremendous success and manifest talent as a frontier humorist, and given his well-earned reputation as a trenchant political satirist, several questions pose themselves, most prominently the question of motivation. Why should Hooper turn suddenly away from the fruitful vein of frontier humor that he had mined with such resounding success, and also away from the contemporary political issues and controversies that obviously fascinated him in the antebellum present, only to strike out in a new book in an entirely different direction? In his lavish "Dedication" to Henry William Herbert, Hooper gives us a clue: "If this little book incites the young Sportsman to read your own unequalled *Field Sports*, it will have accomplished its main purpose" (5). With its scholarly emphasis on the scientific identification and classification of numerous game birds and waterfowl, including detailed commentaries on breeding and nesting cycles, seasonal habitat preferences, and responsible methods of hunting, together with advice on which guns, ammunition, and dogs are best suited to each species,

³All Parenthetical reference in the text are to this facsimile reprinting of the 1856 edition.

Herbert's *Field Sports* (1848) was undoubtedly unequalled in its time. It provided a great wealth of information that would have been eminently useful to the well-heeled antebellum sportsman. Throughout its many chapters the prominent, recurring themes of impeccable sportsmanship and fair play emphasize its author's respect and reverence for the game he pursued. It would therefore seem that at least part of Hooper's motive in writing *Dog and Gun* was that he wished to encourage the next generation of Southern hunters and fishermen to read and take example from Herbert's earlier volume, a book that is as much a treatise on natural history and game conservation as it is a form book of proper sporting etiquette.

In contrast and complement to Hooper's avowed authorial purpose is Phillip Beidler's thoughtful Introduction to the University of Alabama Press's 1992 reprinting of *Dog and Gun*. Professor Beidler's plausible claim is that Hooper's decision to write a manual for Southern Sportsmen was based, at least in part, on his desire to distance himself from public identification with the title character of his most famous book, *Simon Suggs*. According to Beidler, while the tremendous success of *Suggs* had brought the noted newspaper editor and author a great measure of added notoriety and recognition, Hooper had come to feel by 1856 that his growing stature as a highly respected political essayist and devoted spokesman for the South was frequently compromised by his public identification with the unscrupulous character and unprincipled morality of Captain Simon Suggs (vii-xi). If Beidler is correct, then there is little doubt that Hooper turned initially to the decorous and formal etiquette of properly disciplined upland and waterfowl hunting because he hoped that by demonstrating a thoroughgoing familiarity with the formalized etiquette of sports that were practiced, revered, and read about avidly by the leading professionals and landed aristocrats of his region, he might thereby encourage them to take a more respectful view of himself as mature, sensible, and serious. In addition, he may also have recognized the potential political value of a book that would publicize his accomplished sportsmanship. Not improbably, Hooper may very well have understood the dual advantages of such a venture. On the one hand, a book like *Dog and Gun* could provide his readership with a serious and useful handbook on a tremendously popular topic bearing his name but hardly mentioning Suggs at all. On the other hand, he could also have felt that by demonstrating his similarity of interests with what

were then the leaders of his society, many of whom were sportsmen themselves, he could help to validate his somewhat precarious political standing at that point in his career.

To accomplish both goals—to distance himself from his identity with Simon Suggs and to bolster his political credibility—may easily have formed a large part of Hooper's initial motivation. Like Roger Ascham, the sixteenth-century scholar, author of the first epigram on the title page of *Dog and Gun*, and who wrote his *Toxophilus* (lover of the bow) as part of his bid for royal favor and patronage from England's Henry VIII in 1545, Hooper too may have sought to use his celebration of a particular kind of shooting, one that was endorsed and practiced extensively by the ruling class, in order to gain acceptance, recognition, and support.⁴ Not implausibly, Hooper sought not only to affiliate, associate, and identify himself with the educated professionals and landed gentry of his region, but also to become known as one who could both understand and appreciate why “the shooting of game birds, over pointers and setters, has been, time out of mind, the gentleman's amusement” (7). A statement of the rhetorical similarities between Ascham's and Hooper's strategies might go something like this: Just as Ascham used his defense and celebration of archery to display his great wealth of formal erudition, demonstrating his accomplishments as writer and rhetorician, and aligning himself with Henry VIII by celebrating one of the king's favorite prejudices, so might Hooper also have been courting the favorable public opinion of his peers and superiors generally, instead of the patronage of a single, exalted personage in particular. Certainly a part of what he hoped to accomplish with *Dog and Gun* was to demonstrate to the affluent and prosperous members of the white male hierarchy that his knowledge and appreciation of the sport of hunting game birds over pointing dogs was not far behind theirs, and that he, too, was a disciple of the tenets of proper sporting etiquette. That Hooper himself was already becoming painfully aware of his virtual identification with his fictional character is clear from his postscript to

⁴“And I promise you shootinge, by my judgement, is the most honest pastime of all, and suche one, I am sure, of all other, that hindereth learninge litel or nothing at all, whatsoever you and some other say-ASCHAM-Old English Writer” (49). This is the epigram from Roger Ascham's *Toxophilus* that Hooper included on the title page of *Dog and Gun*. The spelling and punctuation differ slightly from that of the 2002 reprinting noted below in the list of Works Cited.

“A Veritable Mare’s Nest” in the July, 1849 issue of the *Spirit of the Times*. Noting his seventh-place loss in a recent Whig election for legislative candidates, he offered a not unlikely guess for the *Spirit*’s readers: “Reason—‘*too d—d knowin’ about Suggs to be honest himself*” (270).

In addition to Hooper’s concern with his public image, his desire to take an active part in the political life of his state and region and his need to maintain a large subscription to the *Mail*, he may also have wanted to demonstrate his ideological affiliation with a group he both respected and admired. Formerly, Hooper could rely on his family’s aristocratic pedigree and his strong ties to the upper echelons of the Whig party that he had staunchly and outspokenly supported with his pen. However, after the party collapsed in 1854 and after the American or Know-Nothing party to which he had turned faded after losing the Presidential election of 1856 to democrat James Buchanan, Hooper’s independent views left him and his struggling newspaper alone and under constant attack from many different sides. Although these kinds of political and financial considerations unquestionably influenced his decision to bring out *Dog and Gun*, he may also and quite naturally have experienced a longing to exploit his talents as author and editor in supporting a cause whose members’ unanimous and unequivocal support he was sure of. The established cultural framework of sporting lore within which Hooper could think and articulate already existed, and he seized on it eagerly and with much success. Soon he would again manifest this characteristic and very human need to become known as an important, integral part of another regionally prestigious group when he joined fire-eater William Lowndes Yancey in urging Alabama to secede and, later, when he unselfishly accepted the post of Secretary to the Provisional Confederate Congress, even though it meant the end of his editorial and authorial careers.

Although the trajectory of Hooper’s life and work reflects his growing, unmistakable interest in politics and his diminishing interest in writing fiction, a substantial body of evidence suggests that Hooper’s avowed interest in field sports was genuine, unfeigned, and sincere. One good example of the shift in Hooper’s emphasis toward the more respectable business of the serious sportsman is the difference in tone between the first of Hooper’s many sporting contributions that William T. Porter reprinted in the *Spirit* and the tone adopted later by the narrator of Hooper’s “Number Eight” sporting sketches of 1853-1854.

Astute editor that he was, Porter had spotted Hooper's "Taking the Census in Alabama" in the *East Alabamian*, probably in July or August of 1843, and reprinted it in the *Spirit of the Times*. So impressed was Porter with Hooper's talent and so eager was he to publish more of Hooper's work that when Hooper printed "Our Hunt Last Week" on December 2, 1843, in the Lafayette *East Alabamian*, Porter copied the article, changed the title to "A Three Day's Hunt in Alabama," and ran it in the *Spirit of the Times* (23 Dec. 1843: 505). Still impatient for more of Hooper's work, Porter reprinted excerpts of "A Three Day's Hunt," renamed "The Biters Bit" (27 April 1844: 104).

In "A Three Day's Hunt in Alabama," an early, humorous, deliberately fanciful story of the chase, Hooper's colorful account of his hunt and of his remarkable dog, Pont, begins plausibly enough, but soon we learn that the lines dividing the magical world of the Southern Tall Tale from the veracity of this allegedly straightforward hunting narrative have blurred, if not disappeared altogether. Before very long at all, the reader finds himself in the realm of the traditional exaggerations of a classic piece of Southwestern humor where anything at all can happen. Hooper's aim here is clearly not to call attention to his knowledge of the habits of the game or to his prowess as a sportsman. Instead, he seeks to demonstrate how the routine elements of an ordinary hunting story can be altered by the gifted imagination into a fantastic but entertaining yarn. Nor do the other characters in the story seem to pride themselves on their sporting acumen or expertise. In fact, we learn that these men have not even been hunting for two full years. What Hooper does call attention to is what a good time the three comrades have on their short safari. To the eye and the ear of the properly schooled and disciplined sportsman, one sensitive to the trilogy of fair play, scrupulous sporting etiquette, and the detailed interest in natural history that dominate Hooper's later sporting narratives, "A Three Day's Hunt" lacks the authorial emphasis on savoring the totality of the natural experience. However, while the huntsmen may lack the formal learning necessary for them to be able properly to classify the flora and fauna they encounter, the Oakchumhatchee bottom of 1843 that Hooper and his friends hunted during their three-day adventure teems with wild game of every indigenous variety. That Hooper and his friends, none of whom were professional hunters, and without a professional hunter to guide them, could take "one thousand and fifty-eight pounds" of game that

included bear, ducks, turkey, and wild hogs in well under three-day's time strongly suggests that game in this area was more than just plentiful: by today's standards, it was remarkably, unbelievably abundant (505). Confronting on paper this seemingly inexhaustible plentitude of game in a time when there were no game regulations whatsoever, modern scholars err grievously when they seek to impose a template of contemporary perspectives onto these kinds of nineteenth-century sporting narratives. In any event, how could Hooper and his contemporaries possibly know that the plow of the farmer and the bulldozer of the land developer, not the gun or the axe of the hunter, would one day render this marvelous habitat and abundance of game into only a fraction of what it was in 1843? The only hint of the narrator's awareness that their conduct would have been in the least questionable is his criticism of Sam's lack of sportsmanship when he uses an axe to kill the bear trying to escape from the hollow tree.

Granted that the scene in which Sam kills the bear with a blow to the head is a ghastly one, the tradition of the frontier humorists is replete with much greater and more graphically detailed violence. Compared, for one example, to the brutality of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's "A Gander Pulling," Sam's killing of the bear with his axe pales. Indeed, the narrator of what was at that time (1835) the socially accepted and highly ritualized gander pullings never mentions the plight of the luckless gander, hung neck-down from an elevated rope which spans the single lane of a circular racetrack, and whose neck is pulled by the mounted riders until one of them can pull the head from the its body. And really, why should Longstreet mention it, when an integral part of his narrative strategy is to draw his readers into the imaginative brutality of the scene and its deliberately understated cruelty by referring only in passing to the cries of the gander and the indifference of the participants. As Longstreet tells the story, the man who pulls off the gander's head is rewarded a certain amount of cash, not the dead gander, which is left to hang until he rots.

But of course, Hooper's is neither a satiric social commentary like "A Gander Pulling" nor a straightforward sporting narrative written simply to inform fellow sportsmen about his tactics and success. It is instead a deliberately crafted and rather fine example of the well-known genre of the Tall Tale. Nevertheless, this early sporting sketch does contain a number of the genuine, familiar elements of the Southern sporting

narrative that foreshadow what would become Hooper's mature appreciation of the Alabama woodlands and the fraternal camaraderie he finds there. In fact, he is awakened from his dreams of "the crackling leaf and the glistening forest" on the morning of their hunt ("our three days of freedom") by "Our friends, Johnson, Smith, and Jones . . . with the longest and shrillest whoop that ever came by concert from three mortal throats." The narrator answers with a whoop of his own, and in fifteen minutes' time is on his way to the Oakchumhatchee swamp with his friends, "three of the best fellows that ever shot deer or broke the neck of a wine bottle" (505). Recollecting his elation at the great natural beauty of the forest around them, Hooper recalls their entrance into the level ground and lush cover of the swamp:

It was a morning that only the man who loves the woods and free sports could appreciate. The sun was just beginning to touch the brown sides of the hills when our trail dashed precipitately down the rugged side of the Little Mountain, bringing us all at once into the dense cane and bamboo thickets of Oakchum Swamp, which looked so much like the wilderness dwelling of real game, that we could not resist the impulse to give an honest, hearty, hound-inspiring hallow! We made everything ring again, and having done so, felt considerably relieved. ("A Three Day's Hunt" 505)

Such an unfeigned spontaneity of appreciation for the magnificent lowland forest and its promise of the excitement to come rings with the unmistakable note of truth. As Hooper and his comrades reenter the myriad beauties of pristine Alabama swampland, they unexpectedly, and soon, encounter turkey, bear, and boar. Note the tone of genuine excitement in the narrator's words when he recognizes that he is in the presence of an actual bear—"a real, live, wild bear!"—surely the first he has ever seen. Their encounter with the black bears is rendered realistically, but so exciting was the sight of the first bear that the narrator cannot hold his rifle steady enough to fire: "and we with the 'trimbles' so that we couldn't keep the gun on his broad back at forty steps!" Up until this point, the engaging and plausible narrative has followed a straightforward reportorial strategy typical of the many sporting adventures that William T. Porter reprinted in the *Spirit of the Times*. However, when the hunters become so engrossed in their hunt that they lose their way and are forced to spend the night "in the moist, green swamp mud without a fire," the "incredible" feats of Pont, the narrator's dog, lead the narrative away from the recognizable world of

the credible hunting story and directly into the magical realm of the fanciful Tall Tale.

Pont, it seems, has suffered the indignity of having the contents of his feed pan rifled frequently by the domestic ducks that live in and around his master's barnyard. As a result, he has developed what Hooper calls a "mortal antipathy" for ducks of all types. When at nightfall immense flocks of ducks begin to descend to roost in the backwaters around them, Pont recognizes his chance for revenge. Attributing human qualities to animals and, more often, animal qualities to humans, was common among the frontier humorists, but here, in the formal diction of Hooper's understated eloquence, is a truly original use of such anthropomorphism as he tells of Pont's exploits. Waking him around midnight, Pont leads his master to the lagoon wherein a flock has roosted, heads beneath their wings, on the surface of the stagnant water. Pont swims out noiselessly to the sleeping ducks, touches them one by one with his forepaw, and as the duck awakes and removes its head from beneath its wing, he crushes its head in his mouth. So efficiently and noiselessly does Pont kill them, and so quickly do they succumb, that none of the other ducks are awakened. By morning, Pont has killed the entire flock of twenty-seven ducks and has retrieved them into a convenient pile for his master.

The magical events of the Tall Tale continue on the following day when the party encounters a group of wild hogs on their way out of the forest. The leader, a "ferocious old black boar . . . with gleaming tusks and foaming mouth" attacks Jones, knocks him to the ground, and prepares to rip the hapless hunter limb from limb. However, Smith's quick thinking saves Jones, for he "seized the hog by the tail, which he twisted so skillfully and vigorously that the old boar, instead of ripping up Jones, set up the harshest and most discordant squealing that ever shocked auditory nerve" (505). Smith saves Jones from a savage mauling by the irate boar, and the boar's "discordant squealing" brings up several more hogs from the surrounding forest; before they disperse, the hunters kill four of them. Then, using only a hunting knife, they dispatch the old boar that is still immobilized by Smith's hold on his tail. Despite the understated and formal diction, Hooper would surely know that anyone familiar with the size, strength, and temperament of the southern wild boar would never believe that a single hunter could have caused a large boar to "give in," as Hooper puts it, by simply grasping and twisting his tail. As with Pont's imaginary slaughter of the entire flock of ducks by

silently crushing their heads one by one, Hooper here draws on the tradition of the Southwestern humorists such as Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Henry Clay Lewis, and Joseph Glover Baldwin to transform his sporting narrative into the kind of Tall Tale that he knew his readers would enjoy. At this early point in his life and nearly nonexistent literary career, Hooper already enjoyed the excitement of the hunt, the beauty of the forest, and the therapeutic value of communing with the natural world. However, when he came to write about them, they only served as convenient backgrounds and occasions for his seemingly irrepressible imagination and narrative flights of fancy.

Much had changed by the time that Hooper began to collect the sporting sketches, technical articles, and original fiction into the final text of *Dog and Gun*. When the first edition went into print in 1856, the gifted young bachelor who had moved to Alabama in 1835 had become a husband and a father, a successful lawyer and newspaper editor, a Solicitor for Alabama's Ninth Judicial Circuit, and a nationally and even internationally famous humorist whose Simon Suggs was quickly becoming a familiar character throughout the country (Hoole 79). In addition to his editorial, authorial, and political achievements, Hooper had also gained considerable stature as a sportsman. His writing from this later period reveals clearly that the hunt for him was no longer simply an occasion for the exaggerated humor of the Tall Tale tradition. Instead, it had become exactly what it was for many of his contemporaries: a ritualistic confrontation with death through which they could reaffirm their close kinship with the struggles of the natural world, and an important, integral part of how literate white males of the antebellum South demonstrated and expressed their personal and political identities. It is therefore not surprising that when Hooper's election in 1849 as Solicitor for Alabama's Ninth Judicial Circuit happily fortified his always precarious financial situation, he soon invested a part of his new income in the proper guns and dogs necessary for the pursuit of his favorite sport.

Further evidence of Hooper's growing interest in and involvement with hunting game birds over pointing dogs include the several messages from William T. Porter in the "To the Contributors" section of the *Spirit of the Times* which appeared in the top left corner of every front page. As Edgar A. Thompson points out in his reprinting of the Porter-Hooper correspondence, the brief if frequent messages from Porter to one of his

favorite contributors serve to “support his position as a successful writer of fiction and a serious sportsman, and they reflect the transition Hooper passed through as he began to shun his fiction and the Simon Suggs image and to center his writing efforts on the hunt, the turf, and politics” (222). Hooper was one of the correspondents most frequently addressed in the “To the Contributors” section, and in brief reply to an apparently earlier request for help in ordering an English-made shotgun, Porter wrote: “J.J.H.—We ordered your gun from London, two weeks since” (*Spirit* 7 Feb 1852: 601). Porter’s next message to Hooper also concerns a request for a shotgun: “J.J.H.—Can get you a first-rate Gun, made to order here, for \$150.00. A well-broken pointer or Setter will cost you \$75.00. Will do the best we can for you” (*Spirit* 16 July 1853: 253). And finally, Porter entered a message concerning the famous New York gunsmith, Patrick Mullin: “J.J.H.—Have handed your letter to Mullin, who will write you.⁵ Of course we charge you no commission, but one of these days we will take a chew of tobacco or a mint-julep with you, while we enquire for ‘Simon Suggs’ and ‘Daddy Biggs’” (*Spirit* 24 Sept 1853: 373). Whether or not Hooper ever received the gun that Porter supposedly ordered for him from London, he evidently did receive the handmade gun from Patrick Mullin, for in an 1854 article that ran in the *Spirit of the Times* on January 7th, Hooper criticizes himself for his lack of marksmanship, “though shooting one of Mullin’s best guns, about which there is no mistake” (“Sporting Epistle from Alabama: Dog Story Extraordinary” 553). Again on January 28 of the same year, Hooper mentions the same gun in the course of describing the particulars of a duck hunt in which he took part: “My John Mullin gun did the work beautifully” (“Sporting Epistle from Alabama” 589). And finally, after a satirically humorous description of likely vote-getting practices that had caused him to lose his bid for reelection to the Ninth Circuit’s Solicitorship, Hooper mentions his Mullin shotgun in the *Spirit* for the last time: “‘Till my ‘thrubble’ is over, that fine gun your friend Mullen [sic] made me, must lie quietly in its case in Montgomery, or wherever

⁵Patrick Mullin and his brother, John, were independent New York gunmakers whose shotguns (produced by Patrick) and rifles (produced by John) were highly prized and extremely expensive. For a discussion of Patrick Mullin’s notoriety as a New York Gunsmith, see Carey 82 and Satterlee and Gluckman 110. A lengthy obituary of Patrick Mullin describing the excellent reputation among wealthy sportsmen of his hand-made firearms appears in the *New York Times* 16 Dec. 1895: 3.

else it may happen to have got to. When I do get a chance, I'll be certain to shoot something with it, however; and so say to John" ("Electioneering in Alabama").

Aware that he now lacked the public notoriety, political protection, and substantial income of the Solicitor's position he had lost in the election of 1853, Hooper had promised Porter in "Game in Alabama" that he would, "if it pleased you," begin to provide the *Spirit* with "such notes of birds, beasts, and men, in this region, as might seem worthy of preservation." The article is signed for the first time with Hooper's newly adopted pen name, Number Eight (*Spirit* 16 July 1853: 254). However, it would not be until his 1854 article, "Sporting Epistle From Alabama: Dog Story Extraordinary," that Hooper would explain the reason for his newly found pseudonym: "Since I have lost the number of my mess (*Circuit*), and can no longer write myself of the '*Ninth*,' perhaps I shall the oftener have occasion to subscribe myself Yours truly, NUMBER EIGHT" (*Spirit* 7 Jan 1854: 553).

The "Number Eight" sketches provide additional evidence that Hooper's involvement with the "gentleman's amusement" and his increasingly mature appreciation of the natural world were both long-standing and sincere. Moreover, the themes and diction of these later articles reflect not only his emerging interest in the excitement of the sport itself but also an unmistakably genuine interest in the habits and habitat of the quail, topics that would later find full range and scope in *Dog and Gun*. No longer do the setting and the particulars of the hunt merely form convenient backgrounds for Hooper the humorist to manipulate for comic effect. They have become instead the codified, ritualized endeavors of a responsible sportsman, and they have also become an environmental discourse by which one learns to appreciate the natural world in which the pageant of the hunt takes place. For one example, in "Game in Alabama: Suggestions to Sportsmen," Hooper tells us that since "the fiend of Dyspepsia drove me to wood and field, gun on shoulder, to seek in exercise appetite and digestion" two years before, he has "taken to noting, (in a small way), the habits of our birds." He continues by encouraging his fellow sportsmen to send in their observations to the *Spirit* so that "the public's friend, Frank Forester, might still improve, in another edition, his invaluable *Book of Field Sports*" (254). It would also seem that Hooper was impatient with those to whom the quail of his region are nothing more than pests. In

particular, he chastises the local farmers for not being able to tell “within two weeks of the time when the first bevy of young quail (a bird that flirts up in their faces every day of their stupid lives) may be looked for” (254). Moreover, he complains that the farmers improperly refer to the Bobwhite quail as “pa’tridge” and look upon them as nothing more than pests who make their nest in the wheat fields. When the farmers do find their nests they “*invariably break them up.*” As Hooper says: “It is well for the quail sisterhood that the wheat fields are not their only shelters for nidification [nest building]; else we’d soon not have a bird to shoot” (254). Instead of pursuing this critical train of thought with his well-known satirical wit by chastising the farmers in gross caricatures, Hooper instead spends the remainder of his lengthy article telling about the “first well authenticated brood” he heard of this year (June 15), discussing the merits of theories pertaining to quail nesting and egg-laying practices, and pondering Frank Forester’s belief that a quail can actually withhold its scent at will in order to escape detection by either a trained bird dog or a natural predator. Clearly Hooper had developed an interest in more than how the scenes and imagery of the hunt could be manipulated for humor or satire, and his subsequent contributions as Number Eight bear witness to his maturing awareness of and sensitivity to the life cycles of the game in its natural habitat. In “An Otter Story—Game, Etc.,” for another example, Hooper resumes his meditations on the breeding and nesting habit of the Bobwhite quail, and he talks of having gone out with his puppies, but without his gun, to reconnoiter the year’s crop of young birds. He does say that he plans to begin hunting the quail in earnest on August 15, “by which time a majority of the bebies will be nearly or quite as large as the old birds,” although he could have begun hunting as early as desired because “we have no known commencement of the quail-shooting season here” (291). Not only was the season for shooting quail unregulated, but according to a recent online publication celebrating the Centennial of Alabama’s Department of Fish and Game, not until 1907 did the state have any official, formalized game laws whatsoever.⁶ With no game laws or regulations of any kind to restrict the sports of hunting or fishing, neither the times the game may be pursued nor the numbers the sportsmen may take, it is to Hooper’s credit that he would postpone

⁶See Dodd for a brief history of Alabama’s Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.

opening his hunting season until the nesting and breeding seasons are over and the young hatches of this year's quail are mature. He makes it quite clear that hunting them sooner would constitute conduct unbecoming a sportsman.

At the very heart of the sporting ethos that informs *Dog and Gun* lies the implication that for the well-read, very well-informed, and responsible sportsmen in the 1850s South, there were most decidedly proper and improper ways to hunt and to fish. Even if the rules defining proper sporting etiquette were largely self-imposed, they were nevertheless clearly defined and deliberately straightforward. While *Dog and Gun* can be justly criticized for its virtual disregard of the interaction of women and racial minorities with the natural world, and while it clearly is written for the white, male, upper classes of the period, its sincere, serious, and unambiguous message is that those who engage in the field sports of hunting and fishing have a responsibility to conduct themselves properly while afield and to set a good example for their fellow sportsmen. To ignore the pages of advice and incident and the patient, even-handed reasoning of its many contributors is to ignore what then was the best and most responsibly introspective environmental ethos anywhere, far removed from the ruthless pragmatism of the purely commercial hunters who would soon destroy the once-great herds of the buffalo and exterminate the passenger pigeon altogether. Moreover, while the apparent tendency to countenance what in his introduction Philip Beidler calls the "casual slaughter" of large numbers of birds and fish cannot be overlooked, I would argue that a more productive approach to the text of Hooper's sporting manual is to consider its value, then and now, as an exceedingly informative text for serious sportsmen which depicts in great detail the principles of conduct to which the sporting gentry subscribed. In fact, many of its principles of ethical conduct and environmental responsibility would later become formalized and codified into the great body of fish and game regulations that we enjoy today. To celebrate the many positive aspects of *Dog and Gun* is not at all to ignore its undeniable biases of class and race, but only to look beyond these lamentably obvious weaknesses and to identify the value of what, for the time of its publication, were the functional, responsible moralities of an environmentally sensitive sporting code that predated official laws and regulations. It represents, as Professor Beidler

observes, “a whole order of things in cultural eclipse even as it struggles to achieve privileged codification” (x).

One way of avoiding the natural tendency to dismiss *Dog and Gun* out of hand because the language of its author fails to meet the template of enlightened political correctness of a century-and-a-half later is to consider carefully the kind and type of sporting morality it actually advocates. The title page’s excerpt from Ascham’s *Toxophilus* sets the tone for the kind of patient, well-considered reasoning that Hooper and his contributors continue throughout the slender volume. Says Ascham: “And I promise you shootinge, by my judgment, is the most honeste pastime of all, and suche one, I am sure, of all other, that hindereth learninge little or nothings at all, whatsoever you and some other saye” (5). In other words, Ascham, a professional scholar for whom learning was his proper work, advocates shooting (archery) as a wholesome and necessary relief from study and care that is both honest and conducive to his duties. Hooper rephrases Ascham’s words in his first sentence, pointing toward “the manliness and innocence of Field Sports.” Hooper’s claim for the virtues of field sports is therefore nothing new, but one need not go back so far as sixteenth-century England for support. William Elliot had voiced the same opinion a decade earlier in *Carolina Sports by Land and Water* (1846):

The history of man, in every phase of his existence—in every stage of his progress, from the grossest barbarism to the highest pitch of refinement—shows that *amusement*, under some shape or other, is indispensable to him. And if this be so, it is a point of wisdom, and it is even promotive of virtue, to provide him such as are innocent. Field sports are both innocent and manly. (247)

Whether or not Ascham, Elliott, or Hooper consciously recognized that their views of shooting, hunting, or fishing were elitist and refined far more than those of other populations within their societies, there is no doubt of their sincerity in extolling the virtues of the arts of the field nor in their belief in ethical sportsmanship. It would therefore seem that a first consideration in formulating any kind of evaluative statement about *Dog and Gun* is to recognize that the sporting ethos set forth therein was an intensely serious matter to Hooper and to his readers and contributors. Unfortunately, critics frequently misinterpret the reasons for their intensity.

For one example of a typical misreading of Hooper's intent, his objection to the netting of quail is, according to Dianne Roberts, so that the "gentlemanly pursuit should not be sullied" (302). However, in her zeal to discredit *Dog and Gun* and the sporting ethos it represents, she ignores the plausible, practical reasons for Hooper's contempt for "the practice of taking quail in *nets*" (60). True enough, he urges "gentlemen sportsmen" to treat those who practice netting as "pot-hunting vagabonds," but he goes beyond any distinctions of race or class to condemn the practice as in and of itself highly objectionable: "I do not mean that all who indulge in the villainous practice are worthless characters—though a majority of them are—but that the thing itself is so vile an outrage upon all sportsmanship, humanity, and magnanimity, that no man who *knows better* ought to countenance his best neighbor if he will not discontinue it" (60). Lest one accuse Hooper as taking this occasion for looking down his long and evidently fastidious nose at the lower orders of humanity, he supports his claim with a plea for the survival of the game itself:

We have now in Eastern Alabama a great abundance of quail, except in certain *netting* localities. Where they are taken in that way, the bird is absolutely swept away, in particular neighborhoods. I have known a thousand birds captured within a week, by two or three parties using these infernal machines during a cold, sleety spell of weather when the quail is always loth to take wing. (60)

Hooper goes on to condemn the trapping of quail, especially by "boys *and* Negroes" (emphasis mine), and he concludes with an strong appeal to all: "Those who take an interest in the preservation of *game birds*, ought by all means to prevent their servants from trapping the bebies which feed on their plantations" (61).

The gentlemanly narrator has already charged his fellow sportsmen not "to countenance his closest neighbor" if he is guilty of netting quail, and in Chapter XIII, "Snipe Shooting in Florida," Colonel William T. Stockton, whose pen name of *Cor De Chasse* appeared regularly in the byline of numerous *Spirit of the Times* articles on hunting, tells a tale of needless slaughter that to him is disgraceful. The letter from Stockton that Hooper elected to reprint in *Dog and Gun* is comparable in quality and in length to the other chapters, and like them, it is complete with Latin flourishes that identify its author as an educated as well as an accomplished sportsman. However, Hooper may very well have chosen

“Snipe Shooting in Florida” to conclude his collection because of an incident related therein that he felt was important. It seems that Hooper’s famous correspondent had been in December of 1855 on a recent hunting trip to Lake Jackson, about a two-hour ride from Stockdon’s home in Quincy, Florida. Having arrived and begun the first afternoon’s snipe hunting, *Cor* and his friend stop to rest themselves and their dogs; during this lull in the action we learn of the unsportsmanlike conduct of a group who had camped across the lake last December. Invited to come over for a visit at his earliest convenience during the week the party would be encamped there, *Cor* makes his appearance at lunchtime on the first full day of hunting, finding among the group a retired general who has about him a marked air of great elation. When he escorts *Cor* to the rear of the tent, they come upon a curious sight: “By Jupiter, P . . . if they didn’t have twenty-three Blue Peters laid out side by side, and not one other single other bird!” (100). Apparently unaware of how contemptible the sight must be to any responsible sportsman, then or now, the general can only ask. “What do you think of that?” (100). Controlling his displeasure for the moment, *Cor* inquires about the method and technique employed for the slaughter. The general is quick to reply that it was “all military science: it *will tell!*” Having discovered the flock swimming in a nearby cove at sunrise, the general arranged the other hunters so that they surrounded the birds and, at his signal, the “battalion” simultaneously fired upon the stationary flock. So deadly was their fusillade that only three of the hapless birds escaped; but when the triumphant general asks what he had best do with them, *Cor* replies: “Hide them, as soon as possible, lest some sportsman should pass this way.” As Hooper parenthetically explains: “The Blue Peter, with its half-webbed feet, its chicken-like bill, its strong odor, and its absolute tameness, is always spared by the duck-shooter” (100). Indeed, any one of Hooper’s enlightened readers at all familiar with the habits of the American Coot (*Fulica americana*) would take a decidedly negative view of the general’s “strategy.” Worthless as food, utterly unwary, and totally lacking in the rich coloring and graceful movement of wild ducks in general, the coot, as his name implies, is a comedian whose lack of wariness and speed make shooting him an outrage against the fair play to which *Cor* and his followers subscribe.

In view of what today seems like the incredible numbers of fish and game available, the sportsmen of *Dog and Gun* demonstrate time and again that in the absence of any game laws whatsoever, they both created and enforced voluntarily upon themselves an environmental responsibility that was admirable in and of itself. If they were elitist, even snobbish, then their elitism was based on a reverential as opposed to a pragmatic, purely materialistic approach to the natural world and the game they found there in wondrous abundance. As Henry William Herbert wrote in *The Complete Manual for Young Sportsmen*, also published in 1856, the goal of the kind of sportsmanship advocated in works like his and Hooper's hardly advocates the "common, casual slaughter" that Beidler identifies, nor does it advocate the class-driven, condescending elitism that Roberts argues is the *sina qua non* of Southern books of field sports. Instead, I would argue that the following excerpt from Herbert's *Complete Manual* is a straightforward encapsulation of his and Hooper's attitudes toward hunting and fishing in the South. Not surprisingly, its unfeigned sincerity of purpose is manifest in every chapter of *Dog and Gun*:

In my belief, it is not in sportsmanship, as it is said to be in love and war, where all that wins is reputed fair. It is not in the mere killing of numbers, much less in the mere killing at all; it is not in the value of the things killed, though it is not sportsmanship, but butchery and wanton cruelty, to kill animals which are valueless and out of season; it is not in the inevitable certainty of success—for certainty destroys the excitement, which is the soul of sport—but it is in the vigor, science, and manhood displayed—in the difficulties to be overcome, in the pleasurable anxiety for success, and the uncertainty of it, and lastly in the true spirit, the style, the dash, the handsome way of doing what is to be done, and, above all, in the unalterable *love of fair play*, that first thought of the genuine sportsman, that true sportsmanship lies. (163)

Hooper, of course, could not have known that two years later Herbert would take his own life at "The Cedars." What he apparently did know and recognize as valuable was that the sporting ethos that Herbert and the other sporting writers he includes offered the only responsible alternative to a view of nature as an occasion for slaughter or for profit. Far-sighted and practical, he recognized too that if the game and the forests and fields he had come to love were to be preserved and protected for posterity, then the younger generation of Southern sportsmen must be exposed to Herbert's emphasis on sportsmanship and

his equally strong emphasis on natural history. The first words of the first chapter address “My young sporting friends” (7), and frequently throughout the text, Hooper invites his young readers to share in the excitement, the self-discipline, and the wholesome pleasures of the sporting life he had clearly come to love. Surely Hooper must have realized that only by setting what he considered the good example of fair play and sportsmanship for his younger readers and by encouraging them to adopt Herbert’s reverential attitudes toward the sports, the game, and the scenery of the field, could he help to ensure they would grow into mature adults who would seek to preserve, as they continued to enjoy, the natural world and the hunting and fishing it provides.

Though a part of Hooper’s original intention in writing *Dog and Gun* may have been to improve his public and political image, his deep and genuine involvement with the land, the game, and the value of promoting an informed sporting morality clearly evolved into much more than a coldly premeditated political strategy. Had not his sport and his life been cut short by the exigencies of the Civil War, the early promise of *Dog and Gun* might easily have manifested itself in books on hunting, fishing, and natural history that would have rivaled even those of Henry William Herbert. As it is we have only the single, slender volume that Hooper assembled before the clamor for secession and the debates it fostered consumed both his time and his pen. Even so, *Dog and Gun* stands as a monument to the versatility and the ingenuity of this gifted Southern writer who, like many a sensitive sportsman before and since, had discovered the beauty and the magic of the natural world through his involvement with the arts of the field.

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