James Fenimore Cooper was not the first American writer, but he was the first to receive wide national and international recognition—in the form of multiple editions and translations—when he entered the tense dialogue with the European discourse of the New World which underlies the creation of an American literature of nationality. He addressed American concerns and two different publics: New World readers, to whom he gave an assurance of increased cultural power, and European readers, who could legitimate his works with their recognition and approval. The positive reception of Cooper's work was prepared in Europe by the long presence of a discourse of exotic America, from ancient accounts to the hot fictions of Chateaubriand, and in his own land by the desire, or need, to reclaim this discourse.

Cooper is now remembered for only some of his works (in that dark house, Jane Tompkins read *The Deerslayer*, not *Notions of the Americans* or the Littlepage series), and not all he wrote was well received in his

1 From different angles and to different purposes, both Jane Tompkins, in “What Happens in Wieland” (*Sensational Designs*, pp. 40–61), and Emily Miller Budick, in “Literalism and the New England Mind: Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* as American History” (chap. 2 of *Fiction and Historical Consciousness*), see Brown’s adaptation of the gothic as an instance of literature of nationality. Their reading, which is not endorsed by all critics, argues for pushing the beginnings of a purposeful “literature of nationality” back from Cooper. Cooper’s greater popularity, however, gives a clearer view of the interaction between the production and consumption of such works.

2 As we shall see, Cooper was read as a model in other newly independent parts of the New World.
own time. The ups and downs of Cooper's popularity outline the limits within which a claim for cultural independence can make itself acceptable. The combination of desired information, recognizable language, acceptable ideas and images within which author, text, and audience interact—Hans Robert Jauss's "horizon of expectations" ("Literaturgeschichte," pp. 144–207, esp. 173–89)—functions in an especially interesting form to shape the reception of Cooper's work because of how it interacts with the role of exoticism in the claim for discursive power. 3

Cooper made it his conscious task to change this horizon, whose limits are, in any case fluid, changeable, says Jauss, by a great work. For Cooper, who of course did not put it in these terms, the task was to expand the horizon till it encompassed the cultural legitimacy of American writing (Wallace, Early Cooper, p. 63). The limits of expansion can generally be traced in the record of a work's sales, in what is commonly called its influence, and in the reactions of reviewers and critics, those "accredited judges of art and arbiters of taste" who, in the words of Janet Wolff, "are themselves socially defined and constituted, and bring to bear in their judgments specific ideological and positional values" (The Social Production of Art, p. 139), and who therefore tell us as much about their own expectations as about the objects of their discussion. Cooper's case illustrates the tension between a New World literature of nationality and its divided public. The study of their interaction yields information not only about his work but also about its necessary connection with the ideological environment it addresses and expresses.

Cooper became a writer close to half a century after the Revolutionary War, when the nation's political autonomy was well established but its cultural autonomy, the legitimacy of an American idiom, and the viability of an American literature were still debated on both sides of the Atlantic. 4 As his letters and diaries show, Cooper considered cultural independence a necessary complement of political independence and

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3 James D. Wallace says that Cooper invented an American reader to go with his newly invented American novel; Wallace agrees with Jauss's notion that a great writer expands the "horizon of expectations" but brackets the question of literary excellence ("Cultivating an Audience," p. 40).

4 David Simpson, in The Politics of American English, discusses the formalization of a recognizably American idiom soon after independence, with special attention to the linguistic work of Noah Webster (chap. 2) and to the literary production of Cooper (chap. 5); he also documents the importance of the question of American English, whether disallowed by English authorities or welcomed by Americans, in arguments about the cultural identity and independence of the new nation.
believed it had to be contested. It is clear from their reactions that Americans valued his novels' affirmation of national identity and readers on both sides of the Atlantic valued his treatment of the history, land, language, and population of the new nation. As James D. Wallace argues, however, and as Cooper's own literary career shows, the horizon of expectations of any readership for American literature was circumscribed by European literary practice, even as it was subject to mounting pressures on "American writers to validate the experiment in democracy with an indigenous democratic fiction" (Early Cooper, p. 2). Cooper's novels provided his audience information and interpretation no less estimable than the pleasure they afforded as fictions.

Cooper and his public were not always on friendly terms. The great initial success of The Spy and the Leather-stocking books was not repeated with the Littlepage series, for instance, which, instead of flattering his American readers' sense of accomplishment, castigated the nation for abandoning the old republican values. The reception of The Travelling Bachelor, or Notions of the Americans (1828), in which Cooper explored the same national concerns as in his earlier novels and whose impulse is laudatory, not adversarial, represents an entirely different form of failure. Robert E. Spiller warns us not to dismiss Notions, for "there is every reason to believe that Cooper considered this book the most important of his works up to that date" (Fenimore Cooper, p. 126). Nevertheless, critics and the public received it at worst with execration and at best with indifference. This contrast to the reception of the Leather-stocking series delineates a limit to the horizon of expectations of Cooper's public both in the United States and abroad.

5Wayne Franklin suggests that Cooper was defensive and uneasy about the book (The New World, p. 48), in part because Lafayette had asked him to write an account of his triumphant visit to America in 1824-1825, and he could neither refuse nor enjoy the obligation; however, he agreed with Lafayette on the need for a book to dispel European ignorance about the United States (pp. 49–50).
6Cooper wrote Notions in France. Having decided to honor Lafayette's request for an account of his visit, Cooper thought he would hang onto the visit a larger "sketch" of the United States as seen by a visitor whose arrival coincides with Lafayette's (letter to Charles Wilkes, Paris, 25 January 1828, in Letters and Journals, 1:242–43). As a travel account, Notions belongs to a popular genre of its time, two or three books on impressions of trips to America being published every year between 1810 and 1860 (Rene Remond, Les Etats Unis devant l'opinion française, 1:269). Within Notions itself, Cadwallader reviews several such accounts, finding them inadequate and unfairly critical. Notions was first published in England (London: Henry Colburn, 20 June 1818), appearing in America with an unusual delay of a few months (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 14 August 1828); books expected to sell well were often published almost simultaneously in various countries. For the publication data, see Robert E. Spiller and Philip C. Blackburn, A Descriptive Bibliography, pp. 56–57. Al-
The problem does not lie in the form of *Notions of the Americans*, an account of travel from Old to New World which fits easily into an established and still-popular genre. The preface asserts truthfulness: Cooper warns his readers that "many orthodox unbelievers will listen to what the author has said of America in this work, with incredulous ears" (1:x), but he assures them that his facts are as correct as possible, that he "hopes that refutation will not easily attack him in the shape of evidence" (1:vii). The book exists because he has realized that "there is, perhaps, no Christian country on earth in which a foreigner is so liable to fall into errors as in the United States of America," where "institutions, the state of society, and even the impulses of the people, are in some measure new and peculiar," so that Europeans who confront it must "unlearn" much before they can begin to "learn correctly" (1:ix). Thus, the preface also defines a relation with its readership: the narrative voice will speak truths not yet fully accepted and ask to be believed even if belief demands changes in perception, interpretation, and evaluation. Cooper addresses himself to reason and promises that accuracy instead of imagination will guide his representation of American reality; he will make pure truth available through a fiction meant to be transparent. He proposes a literary object that is stable and carries reliable meanings, so the public can read correctly and then adapt its opinions and attitudes to the truth that is both foundation and result of that stability. But this agreement between work and public is not necessarily easy. If *Notions* is pedagogical (the public will learn correctly), it is also potentially polemical (in order to learn, the public will have to unlearn). The implied hope is that transparency will correct the ambiguity inherent in fiction, especially in forms derived from the literature of the metropolis, and that truth will prevail over misconceptions both of ignorance and malice.

though it was reprinted in the United States, *Notions* did not go through as many editions and reprints as was customary for Cooper. It had only one French edition, by Killian, rather than Gosselin, Cooper's usual publisher, and in a translation by Mlle H. Preble, rather than by Auguste Defauconpret, who had a French version of each Cooper work ready a few months after its English publication. (Defauconpret also translated Walter Scott into French. See Vitorino Nemésio, Introduction to Alexandre Herculano, *Eurico, o presbítero*, p. 19. *Eurico* is one of the two best-known Portuguese historical novels; Nemésio traces its debt to Scott, documenting the circulation of historical novels throughout Europe; in noting the translator, he also indicates the perceived kinship between the Scottish and American writers of romances.) Two German editions of *Notions* appeared, in 1828 and 1829, but unlike the preceding (and many of the following) works by Cooper, "*Notions* did not seem to have been published elsewhere in Europe" (Spiller and Blackburn, p. 57).
Thus, *Notions of the Americans* attempts to change the image of the new American nation, an image Cooper himself had helped establish in earlier works such as the Leather-stocking series. *Notions* counteracts the exoticism of those tales, which, as fiction, bear at best an oblique relation to the new reality Cooper wants known, understood, and valued. One could say that in *Notions* Cooper wants to reverse Chateaubriand, turn his back on Niagara, mothball the bearskins, and concentrate on the advantages of Philadelphia.

In *The Spy*, *Lionel Lincoln*, and particularly the first Leather-stocking novels Cooper had begun to elaborate a national epos. There other new countries and their populations could see themselves emerging, distinct from the former metropoles, working out elements of their national ideologies (in the sense of sets of beliefs communally held and thought of as “natural”). The task is paradoxical. Cooper had to differentiate the American from the European and also to legitimate the American against the European; he had to stress the difference in nature and the equivalence in value between what was of the New World and what was of the Old. He had to do so in the language of the former metropolis—language taken both in its ordinary sense and as literature, broadly understood as the cultural forms of organizing systems of meaning.

Cooper's first and very successful novels drew on a long European tradition of representation of the alien and the primitive and on a more recent European interest in a fiction of the exotic. Like other writers in the New World, Cooper took up this exotic otherness and, by a small strategic shift, used it in opposition to the metropoles; the European literature of the exotic became a literature to be written against by an American literature of the exotic. Cooper's career as a writer began with a programmatic imitation of British novels in *Precaution*, and his continued use of established European novelistic conventions of plot and character helped trace the boundaries of acceptability for American writing, but in subsequent novels he expanded these boundaries and, as Wallace notes, "transform[ed] both his art and his audience from awkward imitations of the English into something triumphantly American," creating, in the process, a reading public for American writers, both at home and abroad (*Early Cooper*, p. vii). The success of the

7The point is made by Clarence Gohdes, *American Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, p. 128; it also applies to Brazilian literature (Ledo Ivo, “O romance poémático,” p. 6).

8Wallace stresses Cooper's awareness of and responsiveness to his potential readers' habits and expectations, shown in the clear and specific choices of tone and argument Cooper makes in *Precaution* (*Early Cooper*, pp. 2, 63, vii, and esp. 67).
Cooper and the Image of America

Leather-stocking series, which surpassed that of Cooper's previous novels, strengthened the authority of their language and exotic materials. But Notions set out to criticize this exoticism and to replace it with a language that addresses the newness of America in terms valuable on their own and not tailored to a tradition of defining Europe's civilized self in relation to American primitivism. Thus, in contrast to the earlier works, Notions offers a revealing insight into the thematic logic and the success of Cooper's better-known, better-loved, and plain better fiction.

When Cooper wrote Notions of the Americans to change the terms in which his nation would be known and valued, he was already famous and could rely on a previously earned authority. The Spy (1821), The Pioneers (1823), Lionel Lincoln (1825), The Last of the Mohicans (1826), and The Prairie (1827), well-accepted fictions that used native American materials, had become a source of nativist pride at home and a source of information about America both for educated readers and for the masses abroad (Gohdes, p. 149). Conscious of his position as "the first of our major writers," Cooper "thought of his novels as public acts" and "conceived of his duty as public and national." His letters and prefaces show that he considered it his task to make the new American republic known to itself and to the world, to argue for the importance

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9 Success is tricky to define. It can mean, in our day, the American Academy and Institute for Arts and Letters award to Raymond Carver or Robert Ludlum's protracted presence on best-seller lists or the renewal of a contract for writer number 35 with Silhouette Books. For the present discussion it means steady above-average sales (and some best sellers), respect from critics lasting beyond a writer's time, and demonstrable influence on other writers and on the public in general. Cooper was successful enough to be the first writer in America to live entirely from his writings; in fact, Wallace argues, financial need was one of the factors that made Cooper start writing novels in the first place (Early Cooper, pp. 78–79). After the surprisingly good sales of his second novel, The Spy, whose second printing of three thousand copies sold out in two months, leading to a third printing of five thousand, Cooper had several successes (Lionel Lincoln, The Pioneers) and finally what we would call a blockbuster in The Last of the Mohicans, whose first five thousand copies sold so fast that his publisher stereotyped all his subsequent novels, and which was translated into many languages (James D. Hart, The Popular Book, pp. 80–81). French translations of Cooper's novels generally appeared within a few months of publication in English; American and British editions appeared as nearly simultaneously as an interpretation of copyright regulations favorable to Cooper could make them; critics concur that everybody had read him or at least heard of the Leather-stocking.

10 Charles Adams reminds us that the novels immediately preceding Notions had not been successful and argues that Cooper "had lost his public" ("The Guardian of the Law," p. 120), a claim that seems inconsistent with contemporary critics' suggestion that he should return to the wilderness of his successful novels.

11 Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition, pp. 43, 47. Charles Adams claims Cooper identified his own self with the nation's (p. 121).
of its present achievements, and to claim for it the legitimacy conferred on a nation by its history.

To his annoyance, Cooper was often compared with Walter Scott as a writer of historical fiction, and the similarities of plotting and characterization are not difficult to identify. In Cooper's work, however, the past legitimizes a new nation rather than naturalizing a tradition; he uses the past to strengthen his country's claim to attention and authority abroad and its self-confidence at home, not to mourn the passing of an old order; his novels endeavor to construct a "usable past." For Cooper's contemporaries these differences are sufficient to make him original. William Gilmore Simms, for example, remarked: "The genius of our countryman, conceived the novel idea of so framing his narrative as to make it illustrate the radical differences in operation and effect, of the policy of the new world, in opposition to the old." 

In the Leather-stocking series, these "radical differences," were received enthusiastically by critics and public. In Notions, however, where they appear on the political and not the mythical level, they did not please. Cooper wants to convince his readers that the new nation not only promises to redeem the European past but also prefigures a successful future for a polity whose institutions are at the same time derived from the best European political and social thought and independent of its political, cultural, and economic power.

Notions assumes a European audience misinformed about American conditions. It was written, says John P. McWilliams, "to disabuse a foreign audience and counteract adverse publicity" (Political Justice in a Republic, p. 167). In its epistolary form, however, it also posits a more

12 See not only Commager but also Harry Levin's treatment of the concept in "Literature and Cultural Identity," p. 145.
14 European ignorance of America annoyed Cooper, who spoke of it often in his letters and journals, even when discussing unrelated matters. In one of the Brother Jonathan letters, he suddenly interrupts a discussion of Edward Effingham and Home as Found to state, "I have lived long enough in Europe, and under circumstances sufficiently favorable too, to know that the accounts published in this country and the opinions that prevail in it, are very little like the facts in the other hemisphere generally" (Letters and Journals, 4:267). He expresses similar sentiments in letters to Charles Wilkes (Paris, 25 January 1828, 1:246-47) and to Mrs. Peter Augustus Jay (26 March 1827, 1:209). Cooper also thought of the Leather-stocking tales as carrying factual information, as we can see from the prefaces, which assert the novels' historical accuracy, or, for instance, from his letter to Henry Colburn dated Paris, 17 October 1826, where, in what Spiller and Blackburn judge to be the first mention of the Leather-stocking books as a connected group, Cooper declares that The Pioneers, with Mohicans and The Prairie, "will form a complete series of Tales, descriptive of American life" (p. 224).
limited, though representative company of readers. The recipients of
the letters are a select group including a Dutch baron and navy captain,
an English baronet, an Italian abbate, a French count and retired colonel,
a Scandinavian professor, and a Russian prince. None belongs to the
highest social or professional rank, but all have leading public posi­
tions. As travelers, like the first writers about America, they are sanc­
tioned by an old tradition of reporting on new worlds. Combining
respectability and adventurousness, they are sympathetic to the new
and credible when they report or evaluate conditions in non-European
parts of the world. Given their status, they will be heard in professional
associations and among policy makers; their written opinions will
count. Presumably, they represent an audience Cooper would particu­
larly like to persuade, because they are reliable carriers of his truths to
their own publics.

The Bachelor himself, whose letters constitute the book, is distin­
guished only by his curiosity and fair-mindedness (Wayne Franklin calls
him “an ideal European observer of the West” [The New World of James
Fenimore Cooper, p. 51]). We learn almost nothing about his history or
his person; he is less a character than a neutral conduit, a pane of clear
glass through which the new world he visits can be seen truly; he
embodies Cooper’s belief in the possibility of observing cultural phe­
nomena without prejudice.

To combat prejudice, then, his letters to the bachelors’ club contain
almost nothing but factual information. They report on the successful
military establishment of the United States, on its educational system
and democratic government, on the numbers and character of its popu­
lation, on housing, on the presidency. They are like chapters in a school
book, conceived to inform and to form public opinion with data neatly
arranged under representative headings. The long letter on public
opinion from Cadwallader, the Bachelor’s American guide and friend,
reveals intratextually how Cooper thinks of the book’s extratextual im­
portance; its aim is to correct the distortions about America which the
English impress upon the world, distortions that endanger the peace
and the very survival of the republic: “I do not believe that two grave
and thinking nations will ever enter into hostilities on account of pasqui­
nades; but pasquinades can produce a state of feeling that may render it
difficult to overcome serious obstacles to peace” (Notions 1:331). Cooper
realizes that his task of enlightenment is made difficult by the strong

15 Interestingly, like the unmarried Leather-stocking, they are also all bachelors.
interest that power, even (or especially) waning power, has in maintaining at least the verbal forms of the status quo: "It was an offence against the geographical sovereignty of England . . . to presume to renounce her dominion at all. It was, and is, a constant offence to aristocracy everywhere, to exhibit an instance of prosperous and happy democracy. It was a bitter offence against the hierarchical establishment to demonstrate that religion and order, and morals, could exist without its aid" (1:318). Cooper wagers that an enlightened people will see in the New World, not a threat to the Old but a promise to perfect it. He believes his book can effect change because he equates rational judgment with ideology (in the Barthesian sense of belief disguised as, and disguising, fact) and assumes that both are equally accessible to logic. Thus *Notions* defends American difference as a rational improvement on European values and knowledge, without acknowledging their ideological charge.

The problem, *Notions* implies, is that unlike an exotic tale, which is familiar and easy to accept, American democracy is an experiment never tried in Europe (1:236). Democratic institutions shape the nation's character and its people, and Europe distrusts democratic institutions; ignorance causes European fears, and *Notions* will dispel them through argument and information. Reassuringly, Cooper notes that the economic, political, and moral development of the new nation originates in the Old World; America's difference grows out of the familiar; it does not subvert it. *Notions* claims that America is clearly a civilized Western society and that the rules that organize it broaden but do not challenge the prevailing distribution of political and cultural power between the two shores of the Atlantic. No wonder Wayne Franklin concludes that *Notions* may have been "Cooper's most daring fiction to date," turning desire for parity with Europe into fact; Cooper was aware, says Franklin, that *Notions* glossed over problems treated in the two books bracketing it, *Pioneers* and *The Wept of Wish-Ton Wish* (*The New World*, p. 52).

In his prefaces, as in *Notions*, Cooper recognizes the rift that these new rules create between the New World and the Old. In the "Author's Introduction" to *The Pioneers*, he notes that the new American landowner gives "his name to instead of receiving it from his estates, as in

16 Wallace speaks of *Notions* as similar in genre to the prefaces, though longer and more detailed (see, for instance, *Early Cooper*, pp. 126–27). To judge from Cooper's comments on *Notions*, it is probable that he did not draw a strong generic distinction between it and the novels of American content he had published; *Notions* possesses a fictional component equivalent to the informational component of the novels.
Europe" (p. 9). In *Notions*, the American Cadwallader tells the Bachelor that "moral feeling with which a man of sentiment and knowledge looks upon the plains of your hemisphere is connected with his recollections; here it should be mingled with his hopes" (1:250). In both statements the easy rhetorical juxtapositions span great differences in the posited world views of American and European, new and old; possession of land and relation to the past are based on fundamentally different principles, so that material, historical, and social conditions, as well as the ideas that explain and justify them, must be reexamined. The passages imply that the relations between history and national or individual identity are different in the Old and New Worlds; they also claim that the New World draws its legitimating power from the future rather than the past. No matter that Cooper contradicts this claim by taking the Leather-stocking series ever deeper into the past. The assertion here is tactical, its purpose to free America from the tutelage of a European past whose value and authority are the ideological guarantees of European power.

Perhaps it was Cooper's hope for a reasonable accord between the old and the new that led him to miscalculate the effect of *Notions* so seriously. After its publication in England, he wrote to his American publishers that he expected "this work will pay . . . a handsome profit, for several Americans who have read it think it will do better at home than abroad." The publishers disagreed: "You are, we think, in error as to the extent of interest the book will excite here. To produce much interest severity is required, & however we may grumble at it, we are more disposed to read a book in wh. we receive castigation than one in wh. we have praise." As if justifying Cooper's assessment of the need for his book, they continue: "The fact too, of it being the production of an American, not the view of a foreigner examining our institutions & our society will be against it." Cooper could only conclude that Cadwallader was right: Americans "saw with English eyes, and judged with English prejudices" (1:312), and therefore, the new republic was not yet fully emancipated. More important, the reaction of his American publishers shows that Cooper had not recognized that part of the relationship between books and readers is the imperfect correspondence between the expressible and the "legible," or acceptable.

*Notions* misses its audience in more specific ways. The Bachelor is

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only mildly infected with the European misconceptions the book contests. Because he always sees the error of his thoughts so easily, *Notions* lacks intellectual drama and ignores the emotional charge of a shift in power. Furthermore, because Cooper is trying to show that his United States is a most refined and tranquil country, exactly fitting the European notion of the civilized, the Bachelor's travels want even the commonest kinds of mishap to which voyagers are exposed: his hosts are always hospitable; hotels and inns are always clean and comfortable, if not luxurious; the roads are good; the means of transportation faultless; the people helpful, informative, and polite; the countryside rich and well cultivated; the food tasty and plentiful; the laws perfect; the customs officials courteous, reasonable, and nonintrusive. Indeed, the landscape, as Franklin points out, reminds the Bachelor of France (*New World*, p. 57). The orderly and prosperous life of the people mirrors and grounds their prosperity and the order of their institutions. From internal evidence it is difficult to see why the book was written at all and how it differs from a statistical survey that, as Cooper himself says in the preface, would be outdated by the time of publication. A modern reader's sensibility might be strained by how the Bachelor skims over the question of slavery, benevolently hopes the Indian population will be absorbed into the superior civilization of the whites, and admires the situation of American women, who are "protected" from public affairs and even from the management of household finances, but to his contemporary readers Cooper's picture of his country appeared unfailingly flattering.

If this description makes the book seem anodyne, even boring, it is accurate. Critics could have steered the public away from it simply by pointing out what a chore it would be to read it. The passion of the negative reviews it received, however, indicates that *Notions* hit a nerve: English reviewers received this picture of prosperity most ungraciously. The *Literary Gazette* called it "the essence of puff, puff, puff," and "a sickening rodomontade . . . offensive to every reader of taste and discretion," and the *Edinburgh Review*, whose opinion Cooper valued enough to answer, complains of his "ruling, distorting, and coloring real life despotically as a girl deals with her first doll."18 In this compar-

18 Unsigned reviews from *Literary Gazette* (June 1828): 385–87, and *Edinburgh Review* 49 (June 1829): both reprinted in Dekker and McWilliams, pp. 152, 150, 152. In a letter to Charles Wilkes, Rome, 6 January 1830, Cooper mentions he had answered the article in "The Edinburgh." On 17 February 1830, in Rome, he tells Horatio Greenough that he had sent off the "manuscript of the letter" he wanted published in England and read especially in France. In a note, James Franklin Beard identifies
son of Cooper with a little girl, the critic points to the sore nerve: he expresses the anger of authority (male and parental) defied by a dependent's bid for freedom and rivalry for power. He concludes the review by expressing his confidence that in the future America "will be less and less disposed to pour contumely on the Ithaca whence she sprang, or to break that bow of Ulyssian greatness, which, today, at least, she cannot draw," (p. 152), and by advising that in the meantime the new nation behave with more becoming respect and humility. The reaction seems directed less at the truth than at the effect of Cooper's argument, which would necessitate a reappraisal of transatlantic power relations and of Europe's (in this case, England's) view of itself as unchallenged in its domination. The critic of the Edinburgh Review does not mind the idea of a future reappraisal, but he is not yet prepared to accept the new American nation as an equal and is outraged that Cooper thinks he should.

Cooper was astonished. He had hoped his readers would accept his strong, prosperous, and civilized America as an equal among Western powers, just as the bachelors accepted Cadwallader for his good manners, proper conversation, and the education he offers their visiting fellow. Cooper's earlier books had also described the new land favorably, but Notions shows the importance of the terms of comparison. Whereas earlier travel or exoticizing literature saw America as a theater for unre-
stricted European activity or a stage for European dreams of renewal, expressed in terms of noble Indians and bountiful land, *Notions* challenges the power relation upon which the exotic depends. It disturbs the discourse of the exotic by depicting a modern state whose new forms of political, economic, and social organization might supplant those of Europe. The promise of renewal in Cooper's earlier works was more acceptable because it threatened neither the integrity of existing power relations nor that of familiar fictional conventions.

Thus the purpose, emphasis, and argument of *Notions of the Americans* reshape the genre of European accounts of travel to the Americas. Whereas in the traditional opposition between primitive and civilized, Americans—original or adventitious—are the "primitives" and Europeans the "civilized," *Notions* presents America not as inhabitable "nature" but as the proper site for civilization carried by its citizens. Summing up his comparison between George Washington and Napoleon, Cooper explains, once again, the difference between his enterprise and the usual exposition of exotic difference: Washington stands not as a corrective to Napoleon but as completely different and superior kind of warrior statesman: a "parallel between these eminent men is impossible; but a comparison is easy indeed" (2:194). A parallel would preserve the oppositional relation and the subordinate position of the American term, while a comparison implies equivalence. And in this way too Cooper distresses both the critic of the *Literary Gazette*, who indignantly sends him back to his "novels and romances," and the critic of the *Edinburgh Review*, who opines that America should be content to be thought a "land of promise" for a vague future.

Among the acceptable "novels and romances" to which the *Literary Gazette* alludes are the first three books of the Leather-stocking series, which, ending with the death of the hero, seemed at the time complete. Though other Cooper novels had been successful, those about the Leather-stocking had caught on most strongly, both at home and abroad, where his adventures had been quickly translated into all major European languages. Unlike the de-exoticizing *Notions*, they write the

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20 Levin, in *The Myth of the Golden Age*, esp. chap. 3, and Hoxie Neale Fairchild before him (*The Noble Savage*) show the dependence of European views of the New World on the well-established genres of travel and exploration accounts, upon which were also built comparisons between the two worlds and arguments about the nature and origin of European civilization.

21 In 1823 *Pioneers* was published in New York by Wiley, in London by John Murray, and in Paris by Gosselin (translation by Defauconpret), with two more translations in 1835 and 1849; it appeared in German in 1824 and shortly after that in Danish,
New World in the familiar language and narrative conventions of historical and exotic romances. William Kelly says that the preface to *The Pioneers*, the first of the series, “anticipates [the novel’s] conclusion and undermines whatever suspense [it] might produce” (*Plotting America’s Past*, 5–6) with its description of a peaceful, settled countryside—just like that through which the Bachelor is taken. Suspense is thus transferred to *how* civilization will be imposed, to “the dynamics of American development” (p. 6). This displacement may account for the easier acceptance of a civilized American landscape, but the body of the novel shows us not so much the “beautiful and thriving villages” of the preface as the pristine lakes and wild forests of the traditional image of the New World. Even Geoffrey Rans, who, like Kelly, though by a different route, proposes to rescue the Leather-stocking novels from mythical and transcendent readings, acknowledges that “one of the great puzzles in any rigorous reading [of the series] is how it could ever have stirred the patriotic sense, how the pride taken in the emergence of an American voice could have so completely obscured what that voice was saying, the criticism the series embodies” (*Cooper’s Leather-stocking Novels*, p. 4). He implies that Cooper has been consistently misread; but then the misreading, like the misreading of Rousseau through which Uncas and Chingachgook become noble savages, is as important in the history of the novels’ reception as are the feminist readings of Annette Kolodny and Nina Baym or the psychological and mythical readings Rans opposes.

When Natty Bumppo is mythologized, his stance toward the wilderness and toward civilization appears either to embody or to resolve the problematic relation between them and the nation. In either case, his progressive transformation into the mythical Leather-stocking is a curious case of interaction between literary creation and the public imagination. When we first see him in *The Pioneers*, wiping his nose on his sleeve (p. 20), he is just a curious character, not a hero. D. H. Lawrence sees the drop on his nose as an index of freedom (“Fenimore Cooper’s

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Swedish, and Spanish. In 1826 *The Last of the Mohicans* was published in Philadelphia by Carey and Lea, in London by Miller, in Paris by Gosselin, and in Germany in separate editions at Braunschweig, Stuttgart, Leipzig, and Frankfurt am Main. It also appeared in Danish (1828), Italian (1829), Swedish (1830–31), Spanish (1832), Dutch (1833), and Portuguese (in Paris in 1838); there were also various reprints and new editions. *The Prairie*, too, was published in America and England and in French and German translations in 1827. (Spiller and Blackburn, pp. 27–31, 42–46, 48–51.)

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22 In “Literaturgeschichte als Provokation,” esp. sec. 7, Jauss maintains that reception does not determine production but is neither passive nor isolated from it.
Leatherstocking Novels," p. 70), but it more likely indicates class or social position. At the end of the novel, Natty proves to have been a very good servant; his manners are lower-class; his status explains the mystery of his actions. On many levels, the novel indicates that Cooper intended Judge Temple to be the central character and the central action to be the taming of the wilderness and the passage from savagery to civilization, but Natty upstages the judge. He calls forth the more appealing image of an America just on the brink of civilization and still exerting the attraction of the wilderness.

Natty's first appearance in The Pioneers is not his first appearance in print: the chapter in which he saves Elizabeth from the panther preceded the novel on the market and presumably stimulated the sale of thirty-five hundred copies of the book on the first day of publication. In that episode, Natty is not a toothless old scout, but a knight of the woods; he knows the ways of the wild and the tools of civilization; his behavior, as he places his knowledge, his skill, and his life at the service of young ladies in distress, falls directly within a code that defines the traditional hero of humble appearance and noble heart. His talents, his outlook, and his actions are in harmony with the personal needs of Judge Temple and the collective needs of the settlement; there is hardly a hint that the rest of the novel will show this harmony to be problematical. Natty may even, as he saves Elizabeth, gain the advantage over the judge, whom he puts under personal obligation; he appears on the side of concrete, man-to-man bonds created in the preservation of a family, whereas the judge later opts for legal, abstract obligations that are to benefit the community and underlie the American polity. But the anticipatory chapter is the model for the later Leather-stocking books, not for those parts of The Pioneers which record how a town was built and prospered in the wilderness or how it instituted the complicated

23 Leslie Fiedler calls Cooper "the most class-conscious of American writers" (Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 184).
24 Rossbacher comments on Cooper's marketing strategies and gives this prepublication trick as an example of his concessions to public taste (p. 22).
25 Philip Fisher shows how firmly Natty Bumppo, even at his most isolated and individualistic, is connected with the collective, cumulative history of the United States. He is always "imbedded in the increasingly wasteful solutions of others" (Hard Facts, p. 72), and "the great, central hard facts [are] always . . . incidental to thousands of other transactions that seem to have nothing to do with them and . . . as if by accident, resume the configuration of their historical solution" (p. 73). But when he says that they "seem to have nothing to do with them," Fisher also indicates that the myth of the Leather-stocking works only because that connection is kept implicit and mystified.
relationships and compromises necessary in the state of civilization that *Notions* praises. Insofar as it records the establishment, in a wilderness subject to the "law of nature," of a polity subject to human laws derived from reason and will *The Pioneers* is closer to *Notions of the Americans* than their differences in genre, quality, and interest indicate. But the novel's progeny derives from its exotic component familiarized by narrative structure, plot, and characterization.

In *The Pioneers* the Leather-stocking's lower-class status subordinates him to Judge Temple, who represents not only in possession and authority but also in cultivation and reason, the civilization that changes Natty Bumppo's world. The dispute arising at Natty's first appearance touches immediately on the problems of planting civilization in the wilderness and reflects Cooper's doubts about their resolution. These are issues that *Notions* suppresses. In the argument about who may keep the deer shot in that scene, Oliver and the Leather-stocking invoke a "natural" right: the animal is theirs since they have killed it for food on free land. As the judge lays claim to the deer, he invokes property rights first, then his obligation as a magistrate to enforce these rights and regulate the activities that take place on the land, and lastly the mediation of money: property, law, and money effect the passage from the law of nature to the regulations of civilization. As the scene develops, however, the argument shifts to a question of class: because they are lower-class, Oliver and Natty do not need the saddle of venison as much as the judge's household does, even though they earned it by shooting the animal. The problem of property remains unresolved on either level; establishing and applying the law becomes a doubtful proposition, and the judge, generally a sympathetic figure whose efforts to civilize the wilderness are cast in a favorable light, seems slightly ludicrous, if not dishonest. The scene puts the "natural" criteria of ownership to work on the side of the hunters, while Judge Temple's appeal to class devalues the claim of culture over nature by recalling the critique of class (which we saw unraveling in *Paul et Virginie*) as "unnatural" rather than "civilized." In a further deflection of the argu-

26 The ambiguous and problematic ways in which all important matters—history, contact between races, relation to nature, the nature of empire and civilization—are dealt with in the Leather-stocking novels forms the core of Geoffrey Rans's argument for Cooper's continued importance. His "highest fictional value . . . and greatest political utility" is that he "demystifies ['civilization's'] most prized values. Cooper's . . . incomplete consciousness is irrelevant; it does not impair the opportunity his work offers the reader to reach full consciousness" (Cooper's Leather-stocking Novels, pp. 41–42).
ment, when the judge finds he has injured Oliver, the allocation of the saddle becomes less a contest of principle than an exercise in charity and reparation. As the scene develops, the civilizing process becomes problematic as well as arbitrary.  

*The Pioneers*, the least "mythical" work of the series, provides the clearest view of the contradictions and confusions with which an American civilization that emulates and opposes Europe is imposed on American nature. Some critics set this first novel apart from the rest of the series. According to Rans, given what *The Pioneers* "actually tells," even *The Prairie*, where Natty is "more nearly mythic" (p. 101), must be "qualified and demystified," but he is perhaps overestimating the public's memory and desire for logic in fiction. Kelly sees in the novel Cooper's clearest conflation of the personal and the national, his ambivalence toward the power of his father and father-in-law and toward Walter Scott and European civilization (p. 35-43).²⁷ The difference of *The Pioneers* from the other Leather-stocking novels and Natty's transformation are congruent: mythification takes a specific direction. Unlike the judge, who fumbles in vain for principles that can harmonize community and individual needs, Natty conjures up a world where they are not in conflict; but to do so he must remove one of the elements in the opposition that conditions his creation. For him the only acceptable community is predicated on personal preference and presents no conflict of loyalties. He lives by the "natural" and therefore inviolable laws of the forest, to which he assimilates the wishes and needs of old Mr. Effingham (his employer) and of the Great Serpent and Oliver (his friends). He claims to derive his ethical values from Christian doctrine, but characteristically, he dispenses with prelates or churches; friendship and religion become "natural," functioning in accordance with laws of the heart, inviolable like those of nature. For Cadwallader in *Notions*, the legitimacy of the new nation derives from its excellent institutions, from a man-made framework of laws and customs; for Natty value is grounded in the "laws" of the forest and that other natural phenomenon, the "heart." 

When Natty reappears in the following books of the series, he no longer embodies the conflict between society and the individual; he is in flight from civilization, even as he serves it. The traits that marked his social class on his first appearance become individual characteristics,

²⁷Kelly surveys the psychological reading of the series, particularly Stephen Railton's *Fenimore Cooper*, as well as Cooper's ambivalent reactions to Scott in letters and in articles (pp. 35, 37, 38).
and no longer place him on the lower ranks of an established social structure; instead, they characterize the sturdy woodsman to whom class is irrelevant and who can, like other beings of the forest, blend into—become one with—the world of nature. Whereas in *Pioneers* his head is “thinly covered with lank” hair, his fox skin cap is “much inferior in finish and ornaments,” his brows are “shaggy,” and his neck is “scraggy” (pp. 22–23), in *The Last of the Mohicans* he is “muscular,” with a figure “attenuated rather than full”; he wears an emblematic “forest green” shirt, and his features reflect his ambiguous position between white man and Indian, in the “sun-burnt . . . complexion of one who might claim descent from a European parentage,” as well as his outstanding moral quality, the “sturdy honesty” of his expression (pp. 28–29). In the third book of the series, *The Prairie*, he appears, unnamed, as the very spirit of the unspoiled American continent, no longer necessarily Christian, hardly even human: “The sun had fallen. . . . In the center of this flood of fiery light a human form appeared, drawn against the gilded background as distinctly, and seemingly as palpable, as though it would come within the grasp of any extended hand. The figure was colossal; the attitude musing and melancholy” (pp. 14–15). All markers of class, race, and personality have dropped away, and Natty has become an emblem, a spirit. Although he still serves settlers and explorers, and although the novel is set at the precise historical time of the Louisiana Purchase, Natty is no longer an actor in a historical process or a marginal element in the sociopolitical makeup of a pioneer village; he has become a romantic loner, who singly (in a double sense) opens the world for settlement and then disappears in a glory. He exists in a fully “primitive” landscape, where human bonds have to be constructed from the beginning, as in the group of Ishmael Bush, and where no laws at all stand between settlers and the land. He dies, finally, among his Indian friends, who honor him as a “valiant, a just, and a wise warrior . . . gone on the path which will lead him to the blessed grounds of his people” and as a “just chief of the palefaces” (p. 386). But this last is exactly what he is not: a chief presupposes a social organization, and though the Leather-stocking bequeaths to those who follow him the immensity of yet-unoccupied America, he is set apart from them; they are building their own country, of which they would never consider Indians the “rightful owners” (p. 27).

The slide of the Leather-stocking from folksy figure to symbol, from a member of society, however reluctant, to a nameless and placeless spirit, has consistently seemed appropriate, if not logical or realistic, to
Cooper's readers. Nevertheless, it runs counter to Cooper's customary emphasis on the virtues of civilization. The melancholy note in the image of the Leather-stocking against the dying sun is a reminder of the inherent contradiction between what attracts settlers to the wilderness and what settlers finally do to the wilderness, a contradiction central to Natty's role as scout and adversary of "civilization." Natty's "honesty" is the mediating term that allows Cooper to sever his character from a society he still serves, for it places the source of ethical judgments in the individual rather than in society and eliminates the potential conflict between the Leather-stocking's white "gifts," of which he is proud and which he never considers relinquishing, and his alliance with the unspoiled land and its original inhabitants. In the Leather-stocking series, the immensity of the land calls for a free figure such as Natty and its conquest also demands the loosening of established social bonds. In this, the Leather-stocking series directly opposes Notions of the Americans.

The Leather-stocking's history, his disappearances into the sunset,

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28 Bernard Rosenthal says that Cooper's American readers never took all that mythical stuff very seriously, approving, like the novelist, of replacing Indians with a more advanced civilization. His argument resembles that of Roy Harvey Pearce, who believes that, though the Leather-stocking is "the man of the forest mythically perfected," still "American society sweeps over" him, for he is "not civilized perfection" (The Savages of America, p. 204). His "radical inadequacy for civilized life," says Pearce, dooms him, at best, to marginality, together with the Indians whose "savagism" he partially shares (p. 205). Rosenthal does not quite explain why American readers are attracted to the Leather-stocking, but thinks Europeans like him because they miss the point of Cooper's collusion with his American public (City of Nature, p. 74). Pearce arranges the Leather-stocking tales in order of the chronology of Natty's life (p. 202), which lets him show Natty decaying from Deerslayer to the marginal figure of The Pioneers and Chingachgook taking to drink rather than rejuvenated and restored; that strategy fails to account for either the development or the attractiveness of Natty as a literary figure. Henry Nash Smith does balance the allure of the Leather-stocking's anarchic component with Cooper's ultimate judgment of his unfitness for civilized life (Virgin Land, chap 6).

29 According to Robert E. Beider, the theory of different "gifts" characteristic of different races was current in Cooper's time. "In Crania Americana (1839) and subsequent articles, Samuel C. Morton set out to demonstrate that the Indian was a separate species from the Caucasian and therefore possessed different abilities. . . . it was unreasonable to expect Indians to become civilized because they were incapable of advancing out of savagery. Each race had its own inherent gifts" (p. 311). Philip Fisher identifies such generalizations with the "collapse of categories" that eliminated the earlier difference between the Indian as noble and as savage and became part of the justification for the Jacksonian Indian Removal (p. 36).

30 Whereas Lawrence reads the Leather-stocking's lack of social ties as freedom, Wallace sees it as a sign of exclusion and Natty as one of Cooper's characteristic "marginal heroes" (Early Cooper, p. 172).
and his refusal of a permanent home trace the steady westward expansion of the new nation. As a character, in the usual sense of having attributes such as choice, will, or even just preferences, the Leather-stocking is in flight from that expansion, but within the structure and meaning of the Leather-stocking saga, his simultaneous service to and avoidance of culture are both indispensable to his popularity. He can, at the same time, criticize and reassure Cooper’s readers. He finds them destructive, but he also protects their ambition and their desire for adventure. He teaches them to cope with the untamed nature for which they think they long and loosens the cultural bonds under which they chafe; yet he preserves the security these bonds offer. He promises both freedom and safety.

Cooper’s European admirers relished that sense of freedom, that view of a life unencumbered by the economic difficulties that dogged their ordinary days. Karlheinz Rossbacher shows that in Germany, the Leather-stocking novels (and their many contemporary imitations) became a code, allowing for a certain freedom of speech in the face of imperial censorship (p. 22). What beckons from the Leather-stocking books, however, is not an escape from oppressive European politics to superior American politics, as in Notions but an escape to a prepolitical, primitive state through fiction, travelogue, and philosophical argument. Natty’s whiteness and his strict code of values, on one hand, the redness of his skin and his woodsman’s craft, on the other, characterize him as a mediator between the social and the natural, the village and the forest, the law of society and the law of nature.31

His skin makes the Leather-stocking into a mediating figure in yet another sense. If white characters are often uncertain about Natty’s race (though the true “primitives” can always tell he is not Indian), it is because Cooper creates him “half-rigged; being neither brig, nor schooner,” as Cap puts it in The Pathfinder (p. 16), a “hybrid offspring of civilization and barbarism,” as one early critic sees it, or, as Balzac,

31Ross Pudaloff argues that for Cooper American culture, not the natural setting in which it develops, constitutes the nation’s contribution to the world: “The culture created by Americans was responsible for the valuable and unique elements of American society” (“Cooper’s Genres,” p. 720). It is a measure of the force of the public’s desire for the exotic that Cooper’s rendition of the natural made his defense of American culture so widely read. Note, though, that Pudaloff makes this point precisely about Notions. He also finds a split not just in Cooper’s rendition of the relation between nature and culture but also within his rendition of American culture, between those parts of his novels that function as historical romances and those that function as marriage novels, those dealing with “politics” and those propounding a “society” (p. 712).
extrapolating from the physical, understands it, "a magnificent moral
hermaphrodite, born of the savage state and of civilization." But Coo-
per did not favor literal hybridism, and though he needed Natty as a
mediator, his readers, like his Indians, were never left in doubt that
Natty was white.

The white characters' moment of doubt allows Cooper to resolve the
tingle of otherness into the safety of the familiar. For a few pages it
displaces Cooper's treatment of the encounter with otherness from its
customary location in the marriage plot and connects it with the prob-
lem of drawing boundaries between culture and nature. Natty's mediati-
ging position is the more important because Cooper believes that the
rules governing whites and Indians are different by nature. The rules
governing whites are codified in Christianity, which establishes a corre-
spondence between the physical and the moral. Explaining why he
won't take scalps, Leather-stocking says, "My gifts are . . . such as
belong to my religion and color," and "I'll not unhumanize my natur'
by falling into ways that God intended for another race" (Deerslayer, pp.
75, 76). Religion and race are coupled and together define him. He does
not consider the Indians inhuman, and he spends much of The Deer-
slayer either vainly trying to persuade his companions to respect them
or suffering the consequences of his own respect; he simply considers
them a different kind. The line drawn by color and religion cannot be
crossed, especially through marriage. Leather-stocking is the character
closest to the white-Indian boundary on the white side, and in The Deerslayer,
when he is at the age of marriage and helps Chingachgook
secure his mate, he must state his position: "I am white—have a white
heart, and can't, in reason, love a redskinned maiden, who must have
a redskin heart and feelin's" (p. 129). In The Prairie, where he has lost

(January 1852): 147–61, reprinted in Dekker and McWilliams, p. 252. Balzac admired
Cooper; his review appears in Paris Review, July 25, 1840, trans. K. P. Wormeley, The
Personal Opinions of Honoré de Balzac (Boston, 1899), reprinted in Dekker and McWilli-
ams, p. 196.

33 See Jane Tompkins's discussion of the Leather-stocking novels in Criticism 23 (1981):
24–41, reprinted as "No Apologies for the Iroquois: A New Way to Read the Leather-
stocking Novels," in Sensational Designs (pp. 94–121).

34 This aspect of the Leather-stocking saga has been widely studied, especially as it
appears in The Last of the Mohicans. Fiedler believes that "miscegenation is the secret
theme of the world's favorite story of adventure, the secret theme of the Leather-
stocking Tales as a whole" (p. 205), and for Nina Baym, Cooper's is not so much an
"American" way of facing the question of intermarriage as a "male" position in close
and contentious intertextual relation with similar stories by women. See "How Men
and Women Wrote Indian Stories."
all the names he had acquired in the other novels, he frequently refers to himself as “a man without a cross,” as if that, and not the actions that had made him Deerslayer, Pathfinder, or Hawkeye, were both his final identity and his legacy. Uncas, on the other hand, the noblest of all Cooper’s savages and the closest to the boundary on the Indian side, is still made to take a scalp—even if it is just one—so that he is firmly marked as having red “gifts.” The readers, if not the characters, “see” the fresh scalp at his belt and learn his true nature. But Uncas can still raise the specter, if not the question (for the line is not in the end questionable), of “crossing.” Ordinary lust of Indian men for white women threatens the whites only as would a hungry bear that attacked their camp. Uncas, however, falls in chivalrous love with Cora, who reciprocates. Whereas Alice sees in him only the animal or the aesthetic object, Cora sees in him the man, in the sense in which she is woman. But having conjured up the specter of love between Uncas and Cora, Cooper beats a retreat. He never leaves Cora and Uncas alone together; he never brings himself to comment on their feelings for each other; he makes Cora a nonwhite, giving her an African ancestry, the result of her father’s crossing of the line, and finally, he eliminates the problem by killing the lovers. Only the Indian maidens at their funeral, who do not play the game by white rules, sing about the possibility that Uncas and Cora might meet again in the next world (and Leather-stocking is happy that Munro and Heyward do not understand the chant).

Cora, the woman with a cross, straddles the boundary that separates the white, civilized game from the nonwhite one, and for that alone she is doomed. She cannot belong to either side and will not be one of the mothers of the nation. She is not even attractive to any of the white males in the story as the forbidden (Jewish) Rebecca is to Scott’s hero Ivanhoe, and the dark, sensuous ladies of romantic fiction can be to heroes they will lose to feeble pale blondes. Uncas, who loves her, is doubly doomed, for not seeing the taint in her and for looking with desire across the line that separates them.

35 See also Terence Martin, “From the Ruins of History,” p. 227.
36 Fiedler says Cora and Hayward are attracted to each other (p. 206), but though he admires her, Hayward does not think of Cora as a wife. Fiedler also asserts that “Cooper’s own contemporaries urged him to let Cora and Uncas be joined in marriage” (p. 207): thus Cooper’s horror of this marriage is his own; his tolerance is reserved for the sexless but homoerotically tinged relationship between Natty and the Great Serpent, which becomes a fundamental American myth.
37 Kelly notes that Colonel Munro was driven abroad because, for reasons of class, he could not marry his sweetheart (p. 54). As in Paul et Virginie, class barriers lead
Cora is also Cooper's adaptation of European literary convention to the requirements of a literature of nationality. She belongs to the set of dark, interesting, but doomed heroines, descendants of Mme de Staël's Corinne, who die or enter convents in nineteenth-century novels while their blond, submissive sisters marry romantic heroes. The pale, blond Alice, for whom no critic has anything good to say, will marry and raise the future citizens of the republic. In her, Cooper rejects the exogamous possibility with which Colonel Munro experimented, and Cora, the result of the experiment. The question for Cooper is not, however, one of character. As Nina Baym points out, Cora "is not in any meaningful sense a bad woman. On the contrary, she is very good" ("Women," p. 704). Her darkness does not denote a character flaw, only a "cross", it thus becomes part of the dramatization of the themes of separation and distinction central to a vision of the new land where the establishment of civilization requires that only one stance toward nature, one strand of history, one strain of the population impose themselves. The theme of incest, prominent in texts that confront "crossing" of class or color lines as a real possibility because it provides an alternative as dreaded and desired as marriage to the other, is correspondingly attenuated in Cooper's novels. It flickers briefly over the relationship between Oliver and Elizabeth in The Pioneers (as does exogamy in the suggestion that Oliver is a blood relation of Mohegan). It does not disappear, however, and Leslie Fiedler finds it in the love of the same underlying the friendship between others which binds the Leatherstocking and Chingachgook, as well as a string of male friends from different races central in the literature of a culture that steadfastly prefers the absence of issue to hybridism.

It is only in the Leatherstocking himself that Cooper allows for the permeability of boundaries between white and Indian, which come to stand for the realms of culture and nature, and only by isolating him from settlements and barring him from marriage. Natty settles on the

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38 See Ellen Moers, "Performing Heroism."
39 In "The Women of Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales" Nina Baym calls her "unquestionably the silliest of Cooper's heroines." Because "she is certain to faint whenever any situation of stress arises," she is the character "in which the concept of woman as package becomes literally expressed" (p. 704).
40 For Fisher, cultural continuity through marriage is coupled with massacre (p. 36); the possibility of hybridism is eliminated by the elimination of one of its elements. In any case, it is dangerous territory.
frontier and becomes its embodiment. But it is part of the impulse of civilization, defined in the terms Europe took to America, that it should keep pushing against the frontier and absorbing nature into itself. Natty's duality keeps him outside the cycle of production and reproduction as surely as Cora's "cross."

But the Leather-stocking is also a hybrid of two literary figures. He is the early adventurer who tells about savage lands and begins to inscribe European history on their emptiness, and he is the inhabitant of these lands, waiting in innocence to redeem Europe from its history. A French critic saw him as "the embodiment of the first dream of Jean Jacques Rousseau," indicating at the same time one of the curious transformations of the noble savage in common parlance and how a figure such as the Leather-stocking could seem familiar to European readers of tales of discoveries and conquest, of Rousseau and Chateaubriand. In Natty and the Delawares of the Leather-stocking series, the noble savage of a misread Rousseau returns to the American shores, invested with discursive authority but shorn of the characteristics upon which such authority had been built, for Cooper dissociates his creation from the political implications of the Rousseauean primitive. Cooper's primitive is not "original." For Cooper primitivism can be invested under the aegis of nature with the highest personal virtues, but without schooling, without books, without a society, even his "good" primitives cannot give birth to a civilization.

Thus the Leather-stocking usurps the place of native noble savages. The first real Indian to appear in the Leather-stocking books is John Mohegan, sad remnant of a once-powerful tribe, humble at religious services and drunk at the inn, whom Elizabeth tries to console for the loss of family, tribe, land, and culture by promising to buy one of his baskets. He resembles the Indians that the Bachelor describes, the "degenerate specimens" found near settlements or the "few peaceable and half-civilized remains of tribes" (Notions 1:245) with whom Cooper himself seems to have been most familiar. These are the last of the "dying

42 In "Small Family Memories" Susan Cooper tells of a trip her father took to Washington specifically to meet with a delegation of prairie Indians, Pawnees and Sioux, apparently to gather material, for he "had already decided upon a new romance, connected with mounted tribes on the Prairies" (p. 59). At that time, however, Cooper had already written The Last of the Mohicans and transformed John Mohegan into the Great Serpent; the transformation was not a consequence of his meeting with an Amerindian population he had not known before.
race" to whom Karl May refers in the brief but forceful indictment of white conquest and settlement which constitutes the introduction to his Winnetou, whose noble Indian hero can escape degeneracy only by dying beautifully before its inevitable onset (pp. xi-xiv).43

In The Last of the Mohicans Cooper's Indians also take on mythical colors. As the action recedes from the town of Pioneers toward a wilderness still untouched by Europe, the problems, conflicts, internal contradictions of settlement fade away. The Last of the Mohicans presents itself as literature of nationality and as a historical novel based on documented incidents, but as Cooper transposes history from the domestic of Pioneers to the heroic, he easily falls into the traditional European narrative of the Americas, including the split image of the Amerindian as cannibal/noble savage which owes more to his reading than to his observation. This split image recurs in the series, with the evil Magua, Arrowhead, and Mahtoree opposing the noble Mohegan, rejuvenated into the Great Serpent, Uncas, or the Pawnee Hard Heart.44 But even the noble primitives retain some taint of unacceptable savagery; its emblem is the scalp Uncas takes behind the other characters' backs. Scalping replaces cannibalism as the anticultural mark, and it does so more directly and openly than the danger of "crossing" undercuts the possibility of exchange and the legitimacy of desire for the uncivilized.

As for the Leather-stocking, cut loose from society after The Pioneers, he acquires characteristics of that same noble primitive—but christened, white, nonscalping, and nonmarrying. He is as free of savagery as of European spleen and as fit for life in the wilderness as any of its original inhabitants. He is acceptable even to American critics unconvinced by the nobility of Cooper's Indians, such as Francis Parkman, who claimed that Magua resembles real American Indians much more closely than Uncas.45 A public of Americans and Europeans familiar with fiction about primitives and eager to find regeneration in the New World, however, saw Uncas and Chingachgook as continuous with

43 The novel was first published in 1892, inspired, in part, according to the editor (p. 749), by indignation at the injustices shown in Uncle Tom's Cabin. It is also possible to detect the spirits of the Leather-stocking and Chingachgook in the characters of Old Shatterhand and Winnetou.

44 John P. McWilliams, in "Red Satan," draws an extended comparison between Cooper's Indians and Homer's heroes and, unlike Cooper, writes Amerindians as ancestors of European culture, he also mentions Chactas as one of the models for the virtuous Amerindians (p. 143).

45 Parkman, in Dekker and McWilliams, p. 255.
Natty and easily recognized their primitive nobility, which consigns the sad Mohegan to oblivion.\footnote{Though Uncas fits the pattern of Chateaubriand’s fictional virtuous savage, it is not clear whether Cooper had read the French author. Margaret Murray Gibb reports Susan Cooper’s assertion (Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper, p. 130) that her father had not read Atala and would not have liked it if he had (Gibb, Le roman de bas-de-cuir, p. 107). Arguably, both women were interested in an entirely original Cooper, eager to stress his “Americanness” by denying any foreign influence over his writing. Although Cooper wrote little about his reading, especially of novels, the first of the Bachelor’s letters in Notions shows that he kept up with what Europeans wrote about America, for he was always interested in correcting their misconceptions. It is therefore not unlikely that he had, at some point, seen a copy of Atala, a blockbuster set in North America and available in an American edition in English in the same year of its French publication (Armand Weil, Introduction to Atala). Reluctantly, Marcel Clavel accepts Susan Cooper’s statement, noting, however, the availability of three translations of Atala, one printed in Philadelphia (Fenimore Cooper, p. 381). Cooper mentions that he was lent Les Natchez (1826) but did not read it because he did not trust Chateaubriand’s descriptions of Indians—his own being the only accurate ones (letter to Charles Gosselin, 1–7(? April 1827, Letters and Journals, 1:211–12).\footnote{F.A.S. says that the Leather-stocking series embodies the dream of Rousseau, but without the social contract (Dekker and McWilliams, p. 134). As for Cooper, in The Prairie he makes Battius, whose arguments never stand up to reason, defend the “social compact” (p. 148).}

The Leather-stocking tales also invoke a view of the New World as the place where the golden age is not a dream of the past but an aspect of contemporary reality, where the ancestral primitive exists in innocence and plenty, uncorrupted by progress or civilization. Natty’s “honesty” guarantees a primitive innocence, even though he spends most of the Leather-stocking novels rescuing friends from what are clearly not so innocent primitives; his asceticism assures his readers that in the forests of America there is paradisiacal plenty, safe from the greed of an acquisitive civilization. He invites those readers to think of themselves as capable of the same virtue in the same natural surroundings. But if they are readers, they exist within writing and history. The innocent perfection of the exotic questions colonization and settlement as well as that second, political perfection of American life and institutions which is the subject of Notions of the Americans. In the myth, a golden age precedes government. Logically, it is difficult to write at the same time of a golden age and of the transformation that will make it perfect for the future of political man. Logically, it becomes inevitable, as Cooper thought it had been historically inevitable, that the representatives of the primitive man whose natural habitat is the protohistorical age of gold expire or that the white man who comes closest to embodying primitive virtues clash with villages, governments, laws, and other signs of the workings of a social contract.\footnote{F.A.S. says that the Leather-stocking series embodies the dream of Rousseau, but without the social contract (Dekker and McWilliams, p. 134). As for Cooper, in The Prairie he makes Battius, whose arguments never stand up to reason, defend the “social compact” (p. 148).}
Cooper's fictions of national identity accounted for the relation between different populations and between settlement and wilderness in the synchronic categories of marriage and the division of nature from culture by means of property and law. He also tries to account for the diachronic relation between present and past. The new nation's need to compete with, distance itself from, and gain the approval of the metropolis whose domination it had escaped so recently and incompletely grounds his search for terms in which colonial history can be told and legitimated. His tales attempt to make up for the weight of European centuries and to find for a nation with a short history what the Brazilian critic Antônio Cândido calls the "depths of legendary time."

For Philip Fisher The Deerslayer, last in writing, earliest in chronology of the tales, illustrates Cooper's notion that American history begins with the arrival of Europeans, who bring their time to the New World and for whom discovery and settlement are chapters of European history. Though Cooper thinks his books should contribute to the "just appreciation . . . of the wonderful means by which Providence is clearing a way for the advancement of civilization across the whole American continent" (The Pathfinder, p. viii), he also wants to dissociate his nation from the "cold and selfish policy of the distant monarchs of Europe" (Mohicans, p. 15) and rescue from European indifference or greed the feats of American heroes. One of his strategies of dissociation is his search for New World equivalents to characteristics upon which Europeans (more specifically, the English) base their claims to superiority: if Europeans look down on the former colony for not having any history to speak of, Cooper will speak of American history. He states at the beginning of The Deerslayer: "On the human imagination events produce the effects of time. Thus, he who has traveled far and seen much is apt to fancy that he has lived long, and the history that most abounds in important incidents soonerest assumes the aspect of antiquity. In no other

49 We are on the familiar ground claimed by Raleigh at the very start of colonization. See Chapter 2.
50 See the author's note in The Last of the Mohicans on George Washington, whose name "does not occur in any European account of the battle which he had won for the British against the French and the Indians," even though "all America rang with his well-merited reputation" (p. 17).
way can we account for the venerable air that is already gathering around American annals” (p. 9).

His strategy is to rescue American history by setting it in a kind of psychological time, similar in a way to Rousseau’s notion of the primitive as introspection, measured in actions rather than in eons; he retells many such actions and devotes to minutiae the time and attention normally granted to important events: “When the mind reverts to the earliest days of colonial history, the period seems remote and obscure, the thousand changes that thicken along the links of recollections throwing back the origin of the nation to a day so distant as seemingly to reach the mists of time” (Deerslayer, p. 9). Emphasis and attention to detail make American history seem as long as European history, the founders as long-lived as biblical patriarchs, their peopling and civilizing of the New World as weighty as the birth of European nations. He is careful not to extend these “mists of time” beyond the moment at which colonization started, however, for the other premise of his account is that the European colonizers created the New World out of nothing. Cooper separates national, historical time from the unrecorded events that preceded colonization and, unarticulated, are as if consigned to the realm of nature. Cooper calls the rock at the end of Lake Glimmerglass “a seat that held many a forest chieftain during the long succession of unknown ages in which America and all it contained existed apart in mysterious solitude, a world by itself, equally without familiar history and without an origin that the annals of man can reach” (Deerslayer, p. 139). History and writing become synonymous in this formulation; unwritten origins, events that are not retrievable from annals or books, cannot be part of the definition of a national self. When the Leatherstocking series, which Cooper presents, among other things, as history, recreates events on Lake Otsego or on the prairies beyond the lakes, it rescues the heroic enterprise of colonization from the fate of the meetings by the great chieftains. Cooper’s tales bring his America out of mysterious solitude and into Western consciousness, provide it with an origin inscribed in “the annals of men,” make it a part of Western discourse. Inscribing the feats of Greeks and Trojans on American woods, as Father Aubry does, is the European solution to the absence of American writing; Cooper’s is to turn the feats of woodsmen into books. At the same time he banishes the original Americans from history altogether, except as written into colonization.

But Cooper also provides the myth in which a proper history begins, by metamorphosing the Leather-stocking from the scruffy character of
The Pioneers into the legendary figure of The Prairie or The Deerslayer, D. H. Lawrence's favorite. It is significant and characteristic that even there he avoids the taint of otherness and makes a legend not of the Indians who preceded the settlers but of one of the colonizers, because, James Grossman believes, "Cooper's sober views as a social historian are not those of a literal believer in the Noble Savage." Instead, "Cooper regarded Indian civilizations as vastly inferior to Christianity, and when he undertook, in his later novels, a realistic rendering of Indian character his subjects were 'bad' Indians" (James Fenimore Cooper, p. 46). The disappearance of the Mohicans and the Pawnees differentiates these Indians from romantic, primitive, redemptive man; the ahistorical form of primitivism is superseded by the accomplishments of civilization.  

The Leather-stocking allows Cooper to encode this supersession not as a confrontation between European and Indian but as a natural process. Natty's knowledge of Indian languages and customs and his love of the land do not estrange him but make him the necessary instrument for the transformation of New World nature into the equivalent of Old World culture. Georg Lukács thinks "Cooper's greatest artistic achievement" was "his singular development of Scott's middle-of-the-road hero" (The Historical Novel, p. 64) into a Leather-stocking, who, like the central characters in Scott's historical novels, can further the march of history. But for all that, the Leather-stocking's progress casts doubt on the process in which he is engaged, whether providentially or historically directed. His color, his "white gifts," and his cultural loyalties make him the scout for a historical process that he basically distrusts and finally disapproves, but neither his distrust nor his disapproval affect his decisions to stand by the characters charged with the future of the society for which Cooper writes.

Thus the Leather-stocking series is also doubly oppositional: it tells how a new society was formed against that of the former metropolis, based on the rule of law and in close contact with nature, through a central character who criticizes the project he furthers and who will not accept the law that conditions its functioning. In The Pioneers the Leather-stocking demonstrates that the law opposes nature and allows its destruction. In this double movement, the series also criticizes the discourse of the exotic on which it depends, since the discourse cannot

51 Says McWilliams: "If, on the frontier, the white man can preserve the virtues of Christian civilization, Cooper's assumptions about the progress that accompanies the passing of the Indian will be justified" (Political Justice, p. 242).

52 See Wayne Fields, "Beyond Definition: A Reading of The Prairie," pp. 93–111.
accommodate the civilization for which it asks recognition. And so we see the need for *Notions of the Americans*, which can accommodate civilization, at the cost of the recognition granted the exotic.

As he records the happy result of an inevitable, melancholy process, Cooper is caught in a dilemma. He agrees with his European predecessors in the literature of the exotic that earthly paradises and golden ages must end. The paradises are profaned; the gold of antiquity turns to the bronze and iron of modern times; the heroes die. Projected into the future, the golden age means death. D. H. Lawrence, for whom the development of the Leather-stocking saga into myth constitutes an accretion of beauty, does not fail to note its concomitant drift toward death and killing, seeing this bloodshed, in fact, as the essence of the myth (pp. 86, 92). But Cooper does not suffer from either preromantic or early twentieth-century nostalgia; in the Leather-stocking books he explains why the golden age must end but attempts to show that its ending leads to something better; the sadness that something good should be destroyed and the horror at the evil within the good that destroys it are counterbalanced by the possibility of desired renewal. The death of Uncas becomes bearable because it brings victory over Magua and marriage between Alice and Hayward; the savagery of the lumbering Bush family gives way to their acceptance of some organized form of justice. In the Leather-stocking series the languages of the golden age and the noble savage make accessible to the reading public something that even the author might not have known how to think of in other terms. In this appropriateness lies part of the qualitative advantage of the series over *Notions*. But the reception of *Notions* and Leather-stocking series also indicates the limits imposed upon Cooper by the discourse of the exotic.

In the Leather-stocking series, that discourse allowed Cooper to collaborate with his readers, using what they knew to tell them something new.53 The differences in quality and reception between the Leather-

53 Rossbacher (who, though Austrian, participates in a general German-language culture) is particularly aware that "all those who . . . expected of America renewal and regeneration and of Cooper's novels that which was entirely new, an escapist transcendence, could only respond to those novels insofar as they presented what was already known. . . . thus the Indians were read not only as images of opposition, but also as familiar figures" (p. 87). At the time, as Rossbacher notes, German reviewers almost uniformly commented on the informational value of Cooper's novels (pp. 39, 41). In fact, they knew exactly what he was qualified to write about: in a review of The Pathfinder, the critic of *Europa: Chronik der gebildeten Welt* (1840) congratulates Cooper on going back to writing about the things with which he is most familiar: the natural world of America (see Richard Dilworth Rust, "Historical Introduction"
stocking saga and *Notions of the Americans* come from Cooper’s misapprehension of how his writing functioned: he thought it wrapped factual information about America in palatable form. His public shared this misapprehension. Young Germans, dreaming of immigration, read his novels as if they were Baedeker guides for their new land, and critics such as those of the *Edinburgh Review* praised Cooper for the truth of his Leather-stocking novels but condemned *Notions* because it did not present facts they liked in that intelligible language of the American myth. As Cooper tries to make a case for an America that, like Cadwal­lader, can sit as an equal in the closed club of European nations, he disturbs the comfortable relationship these nations had built with an America defined as not yet ready for the assumption of power and maturity; his bid for parity chips away at their sense of identity by changing the established definition of the New World, threatening to reduce the importance of the nations to which *Notions* was addressed.

The approval of English critics for a national literary production was sought not because American critics were snobs or cowards but because Europe was necessarily the source of values and of the language in which Cooper and his contemporaries had to think of themselves. When Cooper raged at the dependence of American critics on their European colleagues and wrote books and articles to prove them wrong, he was chafing at a disparity in cultural power. His books contributed to the formation of American literature and to its acceptance as autonomous at home and abroad and therefore gave it the power to determine other discourses of exoticism. He too was compelled to create a national image by depending on previously established models, mythic and literary. The persistent and well-known myths of the primitive to which so much in the Leather-stocking saga refers give it the validity and truth value that facts and statistics could not confer on *Notions*; these myths, this discourse of the exotic, give the saga an interest that *Notions*, for all its smooth roads and comfortable houses in a wilderness, could not approach.

The truly new quality of Cooper’s New World could be accepted and valued only as it referred to what was already well known; yet his works also give glimpses of something non-European. In *Notions* as well as in the Leather-stocking saga, Cooper proposes renewal through political

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Rosenthal says Europeans accepted Cooper’s novels as sources of factual information because they wanted to believe him, because his fiction conjured perils that were easily and predictably contained” (p. 56), and therefore, he was a reassuring guide.
institutions, rather than through a mystical primitivism. The books promised that the new nation would be able to realize Europe's projection of a wonderful future, rather than satisfy its nostalgia for a wonderful past, to implement its political thought rather than its mythic dreams. A readership owes no obligation to logic, however, and so Notions offended because its defense of an effectively subversive government deliberately left out the process of establishing that subversion; in its reach for legitimacy it erased the delicious whiffs of illegitimacy which could make the Leather-stocking's defiance of Judge Temple so attractive. Notions praises the American people for striving to build a just society of civilized, educated, informed citizens and is silent about the pleasure called up by the image of an individual in a world of pure potentiality, where the rules of social and political conduct which confine his reader do not apply and where his heroes must establish new rules. At the same time as Notions describes the comfortable roads and inns and fields, it is silent about the violence that made them possible and forever tainted them.

Notions assimilated the American experience to what Europeans knew and valued about their own and left out, as problematic, the assimilation of Europeans to the otherness of the New World. The Leather-stocking, by contrast, mythic and dreamlike, was more easily assimilated into a fiction of renewal and freedom than were the hard facts and cheerful prospects observed by the enlightened Bachelor. And thus, despite the problematic nature of the return offered by the Leather-stocking series, despite the clumsiness of its language and the creakiness of its plots, despite Cooper's difficulty settling for any particular mode of owning the land or organizing a new society on it, despite the constant reminders that the idyllic life of the Leather-stocking is not possible once any group of people occupies the land or organizes a new society on it, the attractiveness of his world prevailed and gained Cooper millions of readers in dozens of languages, making him the first representative of an internationally respected New World literature. Thus he also became a pioneer for all New World writers in the difficult endeavor of representing the otherness of the New World in understandable terms and in reconciling the expected exotic faces of their new nations with the respectable, acceptable, valid faces they desired.