

“RELOCATING THE REVOLUTION”: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND  
SOCIAL REFORM IN HISTORICAL ROMANCES OF ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

By

Autumn R. Lauzon

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Carl Ostrowski, Chair

Dr. Mischa Renfroe

Dr. David Lavery

In memory of Gran and Meme.

Thank you Gran for encouraging my creativity by happily participating  
in my games of dress-up and story-performing, and  
Meme for passing on your love for reading and taking me, day after day,  
to story time at the library.

I love and miss you both.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines American historical romances published between 1820 and 1860 by authors who situated contemporary concerns and social critiques within the historical setting of the American Revolution. The eight major texts treated in this study are James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy* (1821); Lydia Maria Child's *The Rebels; or, Boston before the Revolution* (1825); Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832); Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *The Linwoods; or, "Sixty Years Since" in America* (1835); George Lippard's *Blanche of Brandywine; or, September the Eleventh, 1777* (1846); William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter* (1853); William Gilmore Simms's *Woodcraft; or, Hawks About the Dovecote* (1854); and Herman Melville's *Israel Potter* (1855).

By looking deeper into stories that, on the surface, appear to be mere historical romances glorifying the Revolution, I evaluate the ways these authors covertly expressed nineteenth-century social anxieties during a period that was experiencing rapid and dramatic political, social, and cultural change. Chapter one describes the social changes of the antebellum period that inspired, and are subtly addressed in, the romances; chapter two analyzes the treatment of George Washington, moving from the mythologized version by Sedgwick to a more ambivalent depiction by Lippard; chapter three discusses the use of Skinners, violent marauders who took advantage of the disruption caused by the Revolution for material gain, to represent social tensions attending class mobility; chapter four examines how women writers voiced their concerns about women's roles in the domestic, social, and political spheres through their progressive portrayals of intelligent Revolutionary-era women; chapter five investigates the treatment of slavery,

racial inequality, and black characters who have major roles in the plots of the historical romances; and chapter six discusses the writers who were skeptical of the popular trend of glorifying the Revolution and wrote more realistically about the complications and negative consequences many people endured because of the American Revolution and its aftermath.

Ultimately, this study responds to a call put forth in Betsy Erkkilä's 2003 article "Revolution in the Renaissance," in which Erkkilä suggests American Renaissance literature be reevaluated by privileging the connections between literature and the historical events that inspired it. This dissertation analyzes the texts in relation to each other, thus creating conversations between these historical romances that have been missing from current scholarship on nineteenth-century American literature.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### The Effect of the American Revolution on the American Renaissance

As significant and life changing as the American Revolution was to the patriots of the late eighteenth century, this war also became a powerful tool for authors of the American Renaissance period. The years between 1820 and 1860 saw dramatic changes in politics, gender, and race relations in America, and the rise of Jacksonian democracy demolished extreme class divisions. David S. Reynolds in his recent *Waking Giant: America in the Age of Jackson* points out that “[t]he years from 1815 through 1848 were arguably the richest in American life, if we view the whole picture of society, politics, and culture” (1). With westward expansion, population increase, rapid urbanization, and a significant increase of immigrants, changing beliefs were inevitable, and authors believed an effective way of voicing their concerns about these changes was using the war that initially brought the country together. In many ways, the country was going through a second revolution.

According to Betsy Erkillä in her 2003 article “Revolution in the Renaissance,” America’s revolutionary period

encompasses not only the period of the American and French conflicts in the eighteenth century but the ongoing revolutions of the mid-nineteenth century, a time of increasing democratization, industrialization, and political crisis when the contradictions, exclusions, repressions, and silences of the founding moment broke forth with renewed revolutionary force in the writing, culture, and politics of American society. (20)



America was rapidly changing, growing, and expanding, and writers used the war as an outlet for their own concerns and opinions. These fictionalized, romanticized, and extremely exaggerated versions of Revolutionary War stories acted as masks of social and cultural critique, zeroing in on problems that caused tension between Americans and called out for immediate attention. Although these writers reached back in history to create exciting, adventurous war stories, modern readers, by bringing in the history, culture, and politics of the Renaissance period, can identify nineteenth-century anxieties by analyzing how each author represents the war, the heroes, female participation in politics, and racial and class divisions.

Considering the American Revolution is one of, if not THE most important historical event in American history, it is no surprise that writers have used representations of the Revolution in literature from the end of the war to the present day. The Revolution especially became a popular literary trope during the American Renaissance period, mainly between the years of 1820 and 1860, and is present in the literature of women, abolitionists, and radicals, as well as more canonical works by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and James Fenimore Cooper. Although these writers incorporate aspects of the Revolution into their literature, the way these representations are used varies according to the agenda and political beliefs of the writers, and perspectives even change dramatically from one decade to the next. Erkkilä points out that “[i]f we want to write [a] critical narrative that brings different races, sexes, classes, genres, regions, and nationalities together in relation to a common story, struggle, crisis, or theme, we need connective tissue” (19). For the first half of the nineteenth century, that connective tissue was the American Revolution.

The groundwork for my topic and research begins with Betsy Erkkilä's article. Erkkilä's main argument is that we should reconsider the ways in which we look at texts from the period that F.O. Matthiessen labeled the American Renaissance. Erkkilä additionally asserts that we need to rethink the Renaissance period by looking at the ways authors incorporated the American Revolution into their literary texts while paying complementary attention to concurrent historical events (20). James Fenimore Cooper, in *Home as Found* (1838), claims that "[w]e are a nation of change," and nothing was truer during the first half of the nineteenth century (qtd. in Kammen 7). To unearth these concerns about change, I turn to several novelists who took advantage of the American Revolution historical romance genre because "[b]oth singly and in dialogue with each other, these writers sought to come to terms with major contradictions in Revolutionary ideology: between freedom and slavery; culture and violence; liberty and union; labor and capital; democratic equality and gender, race, and class difference" (Erkkilä 25). Extreme changes were taking place in the country, and many citizens struggled to deal with such transformations; in fact, these changes caused major tensions between individuals, political parties, and regions of the country, so literature became the logical place to vent frustrations over these issues.

While Erkkilä puts forth these ideas and makes suggestions regarding texts that are important for studying the historical aspects of the literature, she fails to conduct any analyses of them, which presented me with a serendipitous opportunity to expand my own interest in the connections between literature and history, particularly regarding the use of fiction and history to implement social reform. This dissertation responds to Erkkilä's call to action by carrying out the analysis and putting these texts that are

connected by the use of the American Revolution in conversation with each other. The American Revolution is the overt connective tissue between the texts; however, in a much more covert manner, the texts are also connected because the authors opportunistically mask social critiques of their own time periods beneath tales of Revolutionary heroics, adventure, and patriotism.

My dissertation explores the ways in which a variety of Renaissance writers, male and female, white and African American, and Northern and Southern use fictionalized accounts of the American Revolution both to praise and critique antebellum society. By looking deeper into the stories that, on the surface, appear to be mere historical romances glorifying the Revolution, I evaluate the ways these authors covertly expressed ulterior motives and brought to light many concerns their own American readers were experiencing. In addition to the authors who glorified the Revolution and its heroes, I also analyze the writers who were skeptical of this popular trend and wrote more realistically about the complications and negative consequences many people endured because of the Revolution and its aftermath.

A major question that emerged before I began reading these historical romances was why so many writers used the American Revolution as their topic of choice. Several authors in the antebellum American period felt the Revolution was an interesting and appropriate topic for literature; in fact, “[b]y 1850, over one hundred novels set during the Revolutionary period had appeared” (Kammen 54). In order to silence the critics of American literature, such as British reverend Sydney Smith who proclaimed “in the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?” and to build national spirit, these authors incorporated America’s most important event into their novels and drew in their

audience with promises of adventure, battles, and heroes. But beyond publishing novels that would appeal to an audience craving tales of Revolutionary heroics, the authors included in this project ultimately resituated America's contemporary problems within the historical setting of the Revolution in order to create distance between themselves and the time period they criticized, which made the social critiques safer and thus less controversial for their readers. Ringe also notes that

With the passage of fifty years, "the historical facts" of the Revolution, as Cooper observes . . . were "beginning to be obscured by time," and each succeeding year made them more eligible for treatment in the romance form. Most of the principal actors had already left the scene, memories were rapidly fading, and even the events themselves were becoming indistinct. Conditions were ripe for the romancer, who wished to use some real events to establish the historical basis for his fictions, but who also needed considerable latitude for the play of the imagination. (356)

Although, as Kammen notes, close to one hundred historical romances were published about the Revolution, I have focused my attention on several texts suggested by Erkkilä as well as a few additional texts for regional, racial, and gender diversity that shared similarities in major themes. The eight major texts treated here are James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy* (1821); Lydia Maria Child's *The Rebels; or, Boston before the Revolution* (1825); Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832); Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *The Linwoods; or, "Sixty Years Since" in America* (1835); George Lippard's *Blanche of Brandywine; or, September the Eleventh, 1777* (1846); William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter* (1853); William

Gilmore Simms's *Woodcraft; or, Hawks About the Dovecote* (1854); and Herman Melville's *Israel Potter* (1855).

Scholars have looked individually at most of the novels I will be working with; however, many of these texts, particularly Child's *The Rebels* (1825) and Lippard's *Blanche of Brandywine* (1846) have received minimal to no attention. Reviews of the literature on these texts are undertaken in the chapters to follow. Scholars have failed to discuss all of these novels in conversation with each other, which is shocking due to the similarities between the novels, not only in terms of using the American Revolution as a topic, but also in the social critiques that occur beneath the Revolutionary-era surface. My purpose in including and comparing these authors is to discover and reveal relationships that have not yet been explored. As stated previously, the connective tissue binding these authors and novels together is the American Revolution, and many of the authors share similar perspectives and concerns about major issues of the period but have not been discussed in relation with each other. Additionally, many female writers have been completely ignored in terms of historical fiction, particularly their lesser-known novels.

Scholars have certainly discussed the use of the American Revolution in historical romances, although many of these discussions are now rather dated. The major problem with much of the scholarship on historical fiction about the American Revolution is that the topic is approached in a very generic and superficial way, ignoring the inspiration of political, social, and cultural issues going on during these forty politically charged years in the nineteenth century. Donald Ringe, in "The American Revolution in the American Romance," agrees that the American Revolution was a popular theme for Renaissance

writers, pointing out that “the time *was* right for the appearance of this kind of fiction, and American writers were quick to seize the occasion. This was, after all, the period of intense nationalistic feeling that followed the War of 1812, a feeling that could hardly be expected to subside as the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution approached” (352). Focusing more on national feeling and patriotism that was rampant during this period in America, Ringe argues that historical romances were more concerned with plot and “the essential truth of the whole experience of the Revolutionary War” (357). Ringe fails to point out the connection between the topic and the social issues of the time period and makes another painful error by merely honing in on four male authors (James Fenimore Cooper, John Neal, John Pendleton Kennedy, and William Gilmore Simms), completely ignoring the presence of female and African American writers who also participated in writing historical romances about the Revolution.

Additionally, many scholars simplify the purpose of the historical romance, when in reality there are numerous layers to these texts. In a brief discussion of the nineteenth-century historical romance, Gregg Crane claims that in “Cooper’s *The Spy* and Lippard’s *Blanche of Brandywine*, common revolutionary soldiers as well as the Founding Fathers become epic heroes in the courageous struggle for a new national identity (though the political implications of this revolutionary moment differ for the conservative Cooper and the radical Lippard)” (38). But such a description is a vague and surface-level interpretation of these texts. Crane goes on in his explanation of the historical romance: “To allay concerns aroused by this rapid and extensive change in the nation’s populace, the historical romance attempts to imagine a shared or core national identity impervious to or able to withstand such transformations” (35). Indeed, many of these authors wrote

historical romances about the Revolution with the intention of rallying patriotism; however, these texts have an additional layer of interpretation that makes a deeper analysis necessary.

In the first chapter, entitled “‘The name of the Blessed Redeemer’: George Washington’s Troubling Identity,” I look at the treatment of George Washington in three texts. Washington was one of the most popular characters to grace historical romances and the writers and historians of the antebellum period who wrote about him completely mythologize Washington. Washington became a larger-than-life figure, frequently described as a father, hero, and god. Sedgwick’s *The Linwoods* provides the standard representation of Washington that appeared in most historical romances. James Fenimore Cooper and George Lippard take vastly different perspectives on Washington, depicting him as a lower-class character or reminding readers of Washington’s aristocratic background (which was often ignored by writers and historians). Lippard, often considered a radical thinker, even links America’s 1840s imperialist ventures to Washington through a series of dreams about Washington accepting a dukedom from the king.

With the rise of Jacksonian democracy, class conflicts that had been repressed or muted through the years of the early Republic suddenly emerged; this emergence is evident in Cooper’s and Sedgwick’s novels through the use of Skinners, bands of poor whites who supported neither the British nor Americans, who represent social instability in America. As I demonstrate in chapter three “Neither with Us, Nor Against Us: Class, Cowboys, and the Skinners in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Spy* and Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *The Linwoods*,” there is an obvious relationship in both novels between class

and patriotism as well. The Skinners play large roles in *The Spy* and *The Linwoods* as “bad guys” who attack and steal from innocent women and children whose husbands and brothers are away fighting. These men are easily bribed to work for either side, raid camps and homes, and attack soldiers or convoys who enter the neutral ground between the Americans and British. As unsympathetically as British characters are depicted in these novels, the Skinners are consistently presented as the most repulsive class of character because they lack patriotism for either side, and patriotism, as Ringe explains, was a major component and necessity of nineteenth-century America. Cooper critiques the Skinners while desperately holding on to the British ideals of social hierarchy; Sedgwick, however, demonstrates how a focus on class and financial gain derived from older European ideals can be detrimental to Americans. She additionally uses her novel to encourage Americans not to settle within the social class they are born into.

Depictions of women in Revolutionary romances are the focus of chapter four, “‘If I had been a man, I should not have forgotten that I was an American’: Female Patriots and American Heroines in Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *The Linwoods*, Lydia Maria Child’s *The Rebels*, James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Spy*, and George Lippard’s *Blanche of Brandywine*.” Cooper provides the standard, conservative, patriarchal view of women that is ultimately contrasted with the more progressive views of women by writers who followed him, such as Lydia Maria Child, Sedgwick, and Lippard. Charlene Avallone in “Sedgwick’s White Nation-Making: Historical Fiction and *The Linwoods*” notes that “when academics in the 1950s developed a paradigm of the American historical novel, they expelled women writers from the tradition their criticism created” (99-100). Having noticed such a gap in scholarship, Avallone further points out how



“[r]ecent studies of nineteenth-century historical fiction neglect Sedgwick’s work, rationalizing circuitously that the genre ‘must be regarded as a predominantly masculine’ one because ‘the most successful historical romancers were men’ who celebrated ‘male feats and male relationships’” (100). Responding to this neglect of women writers, I have included two novels written by women, Child and Sedgwick, which combine exciting depictions of the Revolution with harsh criticisms against the marriage market while also encouraging women to take part in the political and social sphere of America. By looking more closely at women writers who took advantage of the historical novel, it becomes evident that Sedgwick and Child bring a valuable perspective missing in other literature inspired by the Revolution. The heroines in both novels marry for love and reject their British suitors, thus ultimately rejecting the outdated idea of marrying for social status and money. Child’s and Sedgwick’s women also serve as effective political agents, frequently outwitting powerful men to save the lives of loved ones, although the praise they deserve usually goes to the male military hero. These women participate much more actively in the war than their male counterparts, despite the inability to be soldiers. Child and Sedgwick, in an attempt to teach their readers, use their female characters to show how women can successfully function in the domestic and social spheres. Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick explore how the family and domestic sphere were greatly affected by the war and show families divided by their political stances; in addition to taking care of the home and family, many of the female characters participate in political discussions and openly voice their opinions regarding the war. All three of these authors incorporate strong American women into their novels, an interesting and unique characteristic since the women’s movement did not arise in full force until the late 1840s. Lippard differs

from the other authors both in the depiction of women and the goal that such depictions implicitly pursue. Lippard, who has been deemed a feminist in some criticism, uses the American Revolution to critique the way women are treated by men. The American woman is uplifted and any man who attempts ruin or damage to her is deemed a villain. Lippard covertly argues that women should not have to worry about threats to their virtue.

The abolitionist movement created violent tension between political parties and regions of the country. In the fifth chapter, “‘All men are created equal’: Racial Divisions, Black Characters, and Slavery in William Gilmore Simms’s *Woodcraft*, George Lippard’s *Blanche of Brandywine*, Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *The Linwoods*, and James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Spy*,” I focus on the way authors critiqued race and slavery in conjunction with major ideals from the American Revolution. A Southern author such as Simms writes African American characters in an extremely different way than the New England authors, and especially differs dramatically from the way more progressive authors such as Sedgwick and Lippard view racial equality. Simms depicts slave characters as extremely happy in their situation, almost worshipping their white masters who “save them” from the British who try to steal them away from their home. Simms, while writing a counterargument to the abolitionists’ view of slavery in the South, also used his novel, *Woodcraft*, to expose Northern ignorance of Southern culture. The author of a seven-novel series about the Revolution in the South, Simms argues that the North “claim[s] the wisdom of the nation” but in reality “the New England states did far less than their share in the great drama of the American Revolution” (Allen 499). Lippard, though he does not openly discuss the problems of slavery, has a powerful

African American character, Black Sampson, partake in most of the events alongside white rebels, even mixing his blood with theirs in a powerful scene of brotherhood.

Sedgwick includes interesting African American characters who disagree about freedom and which side should be supported. Rose, a free slave, fervently supports the Americans because she believes “these men are raised up to fight for freedom for more than themselves,” while the other slave, Jupe, believes their good times would be over if the British were run out of town (139). Sedgwick again takes advantage of her novel as a method of teaching Americans about racial inequality and the hypocrisy of slavery compared to the ideals of the American Revolution.

The final chapter, “The Skeptics: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and William Wells Brown,” takes a different approach to these historical romances. Hawthorne, Brown, and Melville are much more skeptical of the mythology surrounding the American Revolution than the previous authors; even though Simms glorifies the Revolution, he questions the treatment of veterans during the post-war era. Rather than glorifying the war and the heroes of it, these writers point out the negative consequences of the American Revolution. While the previous authors laud the American spirit and heroes, Hawthorne, Melville, and Brown portray the American Revolution and its aftermath in a much more negative manner and challenge nineteenth-century readers’ preconceived notions about popular figures and battles. Hawthorne, in “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” (1832), reveals a different side to the British, who are usually considered brutes or villains, and portrays the rebels as the ones who were unjust while also alluding to the violence that was occurring in the 1830s against immigrants and slaves. Melville and Simms reflect on the problems that many veterans faced after the

war – lost possessions and a lack of a pension. Melville additionally critiques the twisted view of patriotism (patriotism = mythologized heroes) Americans had as the American Revolution moved further into the past. These authors were skeptical of popular literary portrayals of the American Revolution and wrote in order to offer a counter-history stripped of the trappings of mythology.

Likewise, William Wells Brown refuses to write anything positive about America or the Founding Fathers and uses the well-known story of Sally Hemings to critique the period's view on slavery as well as to point out the hypocrisy of the Declaration of Independence. Although Thomas Jefferson never physically shows up in *Clotel*, Brown frequently interrupts the story to criticize Jefferson's active participation in slavery in light of his authorship of the Declaration of Independence. Brown exclaims, "Jefferson the slaveholder was the very embodiment of the contradictory fact that a nation ideologically committed to principles of freedom and equality was also a nation in which slavery was the law of the land" (qtd. in Levine x). Brown lifts the British high above Americans because of their abolishment of slavery and acceptance of people with a different skin color. Brown constantly compares the British to Americans and laments the fact that African Americans are accepted and even uplifted across the ocean, but are treated like monsters in their own country. As a devout abolitionist, Brown, according to Deak Nabers, writes a novel that proves to be "the most profound rethinking of the meaning of the Revolution in 1850s America" (86). Brown questions the wording of the Declaration and the intentions of the Founding Fathers against slavery and the current standards of citizenship for black Americans.

These authors were writing not only to entertain, but also, and as importantly, to vent their own political, social, and patriotic feelings. The American Revolution became a popular topic and as more people wrote about it, the more popular, exaggerated, and patriotic the stories and characters became. Nevertheless, no matter what perspective these authors took on social issues, they all made the choice to use a very American topic to highlight the flaws and shortcomings of their contemporary America, rather than concerning themselves with the politics of a past war. Jared Gardner asserts that there was “a problem facing those who would write of America’s origins: the fear that revolutionary stories have the power to spark revolution anew. How does one tell a revolutionary history without – to put the problem hyperbolically – starting a revolution?” (82). These writers, however, did not have this fear. In fact, the often implicit goal of their novels was to enact change in American society.

Americans were facing reforms in religion, politics, the women’s movement, and slavery, but were also celebrating freedom, independence, and national spirit. According to Reynolds, “[t]he United States emerged from the War of 1812 battered but confident. ‘The Star-Spangled Banner,’ written late in the war by the poet-lawyer Francis Scott Key, caught the nation’s mood of cockiness in the face of ordeal . . . [while] Jackson at New Orleans boosted the nation’s morale, reviving the spirit of 1776” (*Waking Giant* 5). In the wake of these events, the country was struggling to establish a national literature that separated it from its European counterparts who believed Americans could not produce any literature of substance. The authors that will be discussed all “retell” the American Revolution in a way that either glorifies or critiques the war. Yet underneath these tales of heroics, adventure, and romance are messages that need to be analyzed and unearthed.

So much political, social, and cultural change took place in the decades leading up to the Civil War that authors often used literature to mask powerful messages, asking their readers to look to the past to critically think about the present; although some critics have peeled back many of the layers of these texts, there has not been a major conversation created for these texts to speak to each other. Erkillä encourages a new look at literature situated within the American Renaissance, and in this dissertation my ambition is to succeed in, as she puts it, “relocating the Revolution not outside but inside the American Renaissance, as its underlying logic and specter, and in relation to its post-history in the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the ongoing global crisis of capitalism and democracy in the present” (20).

## CHAPTER TWO

### ‘The name of the Blessed Redeemer’: George Washington’s Troubling Identity

#### **Introduction**

In the over two hundred years since the American Revolution, George Washington has been, and still remains, a popular character for novels, and his historical feats never cease to amaze and entertain modern readers. The same goes for the authors and readers of the nineteenth century, who also took a profound interest in Washington as a literary character. According to William Alfred Bryan, who has outlined the presence of George Washington in literature from 1775 to 1865, “Washington’s role in literature has been greater than that of any other American, with the possible exception of Lincoln, and also greater than that of any Englishman except Shakespeare, and possibly the legendary King Arthur” (vii). For nineteenth-century writers, nothing was fresher in their minds and in the country’s history than the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Because of this popular topic and the increase in American spirit and pride, George Washington made appearances in numerous novels and romances; as the stories circulated, so did Washington’s legend. As stated by T. Hugh Crawford, Washington’s image was blown completely out of proportion because of “the large (mostly plagiarized) histories of the revolution by Ramsey [sic], Gordon, and Marshall, and popular biographies of the heroes of the period,” including an exceptionally popular (and exaggerated) text by Mason Weems titled *The Life of Washington* (1800) (62). What could encourage national spirit more than a larger-than-life American war hero?

The image of Washington changes dramatically between 1820 and 1860 – at first many authors hesitate to write about such a glorious hero, but as time progresses, Washington’s image and reputation become more of a popular myth than the stern, disapproving Washington from the early nineteenth century. Bryan also notes that

[m]any of the details which the name of George Washington called to the minds of those who knew him personally were lost sight of when he came to be remembered as the leader of the Patriot forces of the Revolution and as the first President of the United States. With the passage of still more time the ‘ether’ increased. Americans who had grown up under the Stars and Stripes did not realize that for forty-three years Washington had been a Colonial and a loyal subject of British kings. (22)

In the midst of the revival of American patriotism after the War of 1812, Washington’s British and aristocratic background was tacitly overlooked, and authors focused on building his reputation as America’s Founding Father and the great national hero. In addition to the use of Washington in many historical romances, authors included biased commentary against the British, particularly the more well-known officers such as Major John Andre and Generals Sir Henry Clinton and Sir William Howe; the depiction of British soldiers and officers was used to create a stark contrast between the suffering and courage of the patriots and the cruelty and lavish lifestyle that the British maintained during the war, which creates a rather hypocritical stance in terms of the imperialistic adventures that America was taking part in by the mid-1840s. James Fenimore Cooper, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and George Lippard overtly portray Washington as the great, humble American hero, a complete divergence from the ways they describe the arrogant



British soldiers and leaders who are convinced that defeating the American patriots will take no time or effort at all. These three authors write in dramatically different ways about Washington, yet they appear to share similarities in the way Washington acts as a hero and leader. On the other hand, a closer look at Washington's presence, particularly in Cooper's and Lippard's novels, destabilizes parts of the myth that envelop the Washington figure.

### **Washington's Myth**

In the early nineteenth century, America was desperately trying to establish a national literature to prove to England that it could produce meaningful and well-written texts that did not mimic the popular British reading material; in order to do so, American writers pulled from their recent history. A plethora of writers used the image of George Washington as the main character or hero in their novels because he had set the standard for hero and leader, but as Washington appeared in more plots, his image went from the mere historical representation to the mythological, larger-than-life god. Writers completely ignored his British and aristocratic past and drew clear lines between this Founding Father and the members of the British army. The overabundance of American patriotism that erupted after the success of the War of 1812 resulted in an overly positive and symbolic image of George Washington. Although this image of Washington reigned in the fiction of the period, it also made its way into historical collections. The patriotic and prominent historian George Bancroft, who constructed his *History of the United States* (1834) mainly from narratives and writings from those who participated in the Revolution, is often accused of giving "a disproportionate amount of space to political

and military affairs at the expense of economic and social subjects,” and by doing so, he focuses much of his (clearly biased) attention on Washington and the ill treatment he received as a military leader during the Revolution (Stewart 81). Bancroft offers a very simplistic view of Washington, and his depiction of the American Revolution takes on an even more partial opinion regarding Washington and the war than what is seen in the historical romances, mythologizing not only Washington, but also the glory of the Revolution.

The period frequently referred to as the Era of Good Feeling officially came to an end in America with the Panic of 1819, driving the nation into an identity crisis with issues arising from the Missouri Crisis the next year. The South felt that its agrarian lifestyle was being challenged by northerners, while at the same time the North felt that southerners were overstepping their boundaries. The Missouri Crisis “brought to the surface questions of states’ rights, political equality, constitutional intent, private property, and biblical doctrine, as well as fears of social apocalypse” (Christopherson 267). Several years later, Andrew Jackson signed The Indian Removal Act of 1830, which was later followed by the Mexican-American War in 1846. In addition to these major historical events, the country was also facing issues that dealt with gender inequality and class tensions. With so much instability and uncertainty, an image of America’s great beginning, Washington, was a reassuring presence in historical romances.

Previous scholars, such as Bryan, have put forward very broad conclusions about Washington’s presence in historical romances; however, looking closely at Washington’s presence in popular novels by Cooper and Lippard reveals a destabilization of the

Washington myth. Sedgwick's *The Linwoods* and George Bancroft's *History of the American Revolution* serve as comparisons against which Cooper's and Lippard's more complicated and even troubled representations of Washington stand out. Sedgwick's Washington, though an interesting character, lacks the complexity of the Washington written by Cooper and Lippard and reflects the popular representation of Washington in most historical romances of the period.

### **The Backdrop for Washington as a Symbol and a God**

Washington plays a significant role in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's novel, *The Linwoods* (1835), and serves here as the stereotypical representation whose relative simplicity throws into relief the more ambiguous Washingtons crafted by Cooper and Lippard. Washington plays more of an active role in *The Linwoods* in comparison with Cooper's depiction; nevertheless, Bryan asserts that Sedgwick's "portrayal of Washington in *The Linwoods* (1835) is at least as good as Cooper's presentation of him in *The Spy*. She may have felt more than the usual interest in the national hero, for her father had been well acquainted with Washington" (207). As Maria Karifilis notes in the introduction to *The Linwoods*, Sedgwick's main goal was to use the topic of the American Revolution as a way to encourage readers to remember the past and look to the future as a means for preserving American virtue. It is no surprise, then, that Sedgwick incorporates America's greatest symbol – Washington – because "[f]rom being the symbol of the nation itself, Washington became the symbol of national unity" (Bryan 19). In a time in America that needed some form of unification, Washington was an excellent person and symbol to include as a way to encourage Americans to come together, despite

the numerous tensions that were present. Although Sedgwick wrote this novel several years before Bancroft's volume of history, which is an even greater exaggeration that magnifies his myth, her Washington character possesses many of the humble and virtuous traits that Bancroft praises the real Washington for. Sedgwick's Washington relishes loyalty, intelligence, and bravery; likewise, he is easily annoyed when soldiers practice imprudence and rashness. Perhaps it is an unfortunate fault by Sedgwick, falling into the trap of apologizing for being a woman writer, but she even notes her hesitancy to write about Washington: "It may be permitted to say, in extenuation of what may seem presumption, that whenever the writer has mentioned Washington, she has felt a sentiment resembling the awe of the pious Israelite when he approached the ark of the Lord" (5-6). While writers of the mid-nineteenth century still praised Washington and appreciated the history and heroics that he brought to the country, they lacked the extreme awe and praise that early writers, like Sedgwick, exhibited. Although Washington is disgusted when his irrational men create flaws in his battle plans and exhibits traces of impatience at their disobedience, he does not overreact and is still treated with the respect and admiration that is often associated with God. Sedgwick makes the same comparison and also praises Washington for his heroics and humanity, describing him as "this great man, like Him who he imitated" (343). Lippard makes a similar comparison between Washington and Jesus in a scene that parallels Jesus's moment in Gethsemane.

Although Sedgwick makes several parallels between the almighty Washington and God, she also writes Washington as a rather stoic character. When Isabella Linwood appeals to Washington for a request to visit her brother, Washington remains unmoved by

her request. When Herbert Linwood, considered a traitor by his family for joining the rebel army, disguises himself as Eliot Lee's servant, Kisel the idiot, in order to sneak back to New York to visit his family, Washington appears extremely unhappy that his soldier has disobeyed his demand that Linwood remain patient and avoid the city. Eliot, though in Washington's high favor, even dreads taking the news back to his general in fear of what his response may be. Washington gladly helps Isabella, Lady Anne, and Herbert as they run from the British, but he retains his stern and calm reaction to any and all events. Despite Washington's stoicism, he shows a deep appreciation for his soldiers who demonstrate loyalty, courage, and obedience and he constantly praises them for enduring the harsh realities of the war. Although much of Sedgwick's novel leans toward the romantic and domestic, she does include realistic details to remind the reader that the war was extremely difficult for those involved. In order to re-excite patriotism, Sedgwick recalls the winter of 1780:

The winter of 1780 was characterized by Washington as "the decisive moment, the most important America had seen." . . . The soldier[s] were without clothes or blankets, and this in our coldest winter. They had been but a few days in their winter quarters before the flour and meat were exhausted; and yet, as Washington said in a letter to Congress, after speaking of the patient and uncomplaining fortitude with which the army bore their sufferings, "though there had been frequent desertions – not one mutiny." (345)

However, by including such a description, Sedgwick also reveals that Washington's leadership was not strong enough motivation for many soldiers to continually endure the hardships of the war.

Sedgwick's depiction of Washington may serve as evidence for the typical representation of him in most novels; however, what makes Sedgwick's depiction unique is that Washington is unable to be successful alone – he needs other people to survive and be successful. Robert Daly points out that in *The Linwoods*, “[t]hough an extremely good human being, General Washington is human, fallible . . . Washington himself is not self-sufficient. He needs help, needs to be part of a sustaining network and community” (147). Were it not for Eliot Lee, Washington's closest and most trusted comrade, Washington would have been captured by his friend's son, Harry Ruthven, who plots with the British to secure Washington's capture. Likewise, beneath his stoicism to certain events, some emotional pleas are understood and accepted by Washington because he treats his soldiers with respect and cherishes those who demonstrate exemplary courage and compliance. For example, Washington gladly allows Eliot to visit his sister because of his concern for her health, clearly not unaware that his soldiers had family duties in addition to their military roles; Sedgwick beautifully explains, “[w]hile the military chieftain planted and guarded the tree that was to overshadow his country, he cherished the birds that made their nests in its branches” (315). Washington's faith and love for Eliot increases when Eliot prevents Washington's capture by the British who have set a plan using Washington's past friends. While Sedgwick's Washington is strict and stern, she also frequently shows his softer and more humane side. Washington receives significant respect from the characters in the book and Sedgwick herself. In the final New York

scene, when the British are leaving and the patriots are returning, Sedgwick includes an admiring description of Washington entering the city: “At the upper extremity of the street appeared General Washington, the spotless patriot, the faultless military chieftain, the father of his country, ‘first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen:’ he on whom every epithet of praise has been exhausted, and whose virtues praise never yet reached” (357-8). Therefore, Sedgwick’s Washington sets the stage for many other depictions of Washington in historical romances.

### **Washington’s Identity as an Epitomic Father**

In addition to Sedgwick’s literary depiction of George Washington, George Bancroft’s “historical” representation of Washington likely had a significant influence on the way Americans viewed the general, since many people by this time would not have had any direct connection with the founding father. Readers had to rely on fiction and historical accounts of this American hero, which often built up Washington’s reputation and character to a greater extent than what his actual résumé would have shown. Bancroft’s *History* provides an excruciatingly detailed account of the events during the American Revolution, but it is obvious, even for a casual reader, that Bancroft is extremely biased toward America and Washington – constantly criticizing the British, disobedient soldiers, and the members of the Continental Congress for questioning or ignoring the military strategies of Washington. Bancroft’s development of Washington portrays him as an extremely intelligent and knowledgeable soldier, but also outlines the difficulties Washington faced as he tried to convince the members of the Continental Congress to trust his military instincts. Watt Stewart notes that Bancroft wrote his

histories “with an intense patriotism that determined the interpretation which he gave historical facts . . . His enthusiasm for democracy sometimes led him to see democracy, or a tendency toward it, where it did not exist” (82). Much like George Lippard, Bancroft may have been guilty of seeing history as he preferred it, rather than how it actually happened. David Levin, in an analysis of historical writers, comments that “[t]he historian was a romantic man of letters” (7). Therefore, while Bancroft wrote a popular and detailed account of the Revolution, much of it can be blamed for the exaggerated myths that emerged about the war, and particularly those myths that inflated the image of George Washington.

Bancroft’s *History* certainly takes on a biased opinion of Washington, as he includes how often Washington was questioned or disobeyed, but Bancroft also highlights the victorious decisions Washington made when it came to military strategy. Most of the patriot victories occurred because of strategic decisions by Washington, but, as Bancroft points out, he never claims praise for himself: “You pay me compliments . . . as if the merit of that affair was due solely to me; but, I assure you, the other general officers, who assisted me in the plan and execution, have full as good a right to your encomiums as myself” (99). Mike Ewart gives a lengthy, yet informative account of Bancroft’s love for Washington:

Washington provides a similar focus for Bancroft's account of the Revolution – an account which is, in contrast to Cooper's, pre-eminently celebratory. The differences between the focal pictures can be located precisely in the distance between the gentle man and the people. . . . And in contrast to Cooper's Washington, Bancroft's Washington is such a



representative man, defined not as a member of a particular class. . . . Bancroft's Washington “never drew to himself admiration for the possession of any one quality in excess, never made in council any one suggestion that was sublime but impracticable, never in action took to himself the praise or the blame of undertakings astonishing in conception, but beyond his means of execution. . . . His qualities were so faultlessly proportioned that his whole country rather claimed him as its choicest representative, the most complete expression of all its attainments and aspirations. He studied his country and conformed to it. His countrymen felt that he was the best type of American, and rejoiced in it, and were proud of it. They lived in his life, and made his success and his praise their own.” (78-9)

Levin argues that Bancroft believed Washington was “the ideally representative man [and] the incarnation of the People. He represented national ideals. He acted in the name of the People, and they acted through him. The relationship was emotional, often almost mystical. However lofty the leader was, he loved the People” (50). But as Levin analyzes the way Bancroft and other historians, such as William H. Prescott, wrote about the Revolution, he describes them as approaching the history of the country with “imaginative contemplation” and a “romantic attitude toward the Past” (8). The historical accounts may very well be accurate, but the way Bancroft writes about Washington appears star struck and overly positive.

Although Hermann E. von Holst states that “[e]very historian of the United States must stand on [George] Bancroft's shoulders,” Bancroft can also be accused of writing

biased histories of the United States, clearly giving precedence and positive attention to certain historical events and personalities (qtd. in Stewart 77). In fact, due to Bancroft's popularized *History of the United States of America*, many authors latched on to Bancroft's writing style and followed his approach of exaggerating George Washington's image. As Bancroft describes Washington's feats and battle strategies, he frequently sympathizes with the general by pointing out the backlash Washington received from the members of the Continental Congress. In addition to his own personal laud, Bancroft includes comments from many of Washington's contemporaries to convince nineteenth-century readers of Washington's valor. Bancroft inserts part of a letter from the North Carolina representative, William Hooper, that only adds to the absurd myth that Washington had been turned into: "how often America has been rescued from ruin by the mere strength of his genius, conduct, and courage, encountering every obstacle that want of money, men, arms, ammunition, could throw in his way, an impartial world will say with you that he is the greatest man on earth . . . I could fill the side in his praise; but anything I can say can not equal his merits" (110). While Bancroft, and those he includes in his praise of Washington, offers a faultless image of General Washington, he, not surprisingly, describes the British officers with the same negative characteristics of Cooper and Sedgwick. General Howe receives the brunt of Bancroft's attack, mainly in comparison with Washington's more virtuous traits. Leading up to Howe's major descriptions, Bancroft notes that Washington and his men stood in flooded trenches, endured the snow and rain without sufficient shelter, and survived by eating raw pork, adding that Washington became an even greater man in the eyes of the soldiers he was leading because he was "enduring hardships equally" (34). Howe and the British soldiers,

on the other hand, are much better situated and take advantage of their superior situation. Stewart is also aware of Bancroft's clear bias toward Washington and notes about Bancroft, "[a]nother strong influence with Bancroft was his intense patriotism. This feeling affected much that he wrote. To exalt the fatherland the purest motives are invariably attributed to the actors in the national drama" (82). Writing the many volumes of his *History* between 1834 and 1860, Bancroft would have been well aware of the historical events that followed the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Issues with class, race, gender, and imperialism were overshadowed by reminders of America's and Washington's greatness. America was certainly trying to establish itself as a ruling empire, no different than Britain, except in the chapters of Bancroft's *History* where he clearly tries to create a defined separation between America (through Washington) and England (through Howe):

General Sir William Howe, by illegitimate descent an uncle to the king, was of a very different cast of mind. Six feet tall, of an uncommonly dark complexion, a coarse frame, and a sluggish mould, he succumbed unresistingly to his sensual nature. . . . He had had military experience, and had read books on war; but, being destitute of swiftness of thought and will, he was formed to carry on war by rule. On the field of battle . . . he was lethargic, wanting alertness and sagacity. He hated business; and his impatience at being forced to attend to it made him difficult of access, and gained him the reputation of being haughty and morose. Indolence was his bane: not wilfully merciless, he permitted his prisoners to suffer from atrocious cruelty. . . . His notions of honor in money matters were

not nice. . . . He indulged freely in pleasure . . . and his example led many of the young to ruin themselves by gaming. (34-5)

Bancroft also praises Washington's battle instincts while showing the numerous officers who frequently went behind Washington's back to carry out their own plans of action or "tattled" on Washington to accelerate their own movement through rank. While Bancroft narrates Washington's successes, he adds to the image of the great hero with details about how Washington is frequently attacked by Congress and other officers who try to point out his failures. According to Watt Stewart, "[t]he success of the History is proven both by extent of sales and by testimony of the author's contemporaries. This 'immediate and unbounded popularity and acceptance' came mainly . . . from the fact that Bancroft 'caught, and with sincere and enthusiastic conviction, repeated to the American people, the things which they were saying and thinking concerning themselves'" (79). Bancroft got caught up in the excitement of the revival of the Revolutionary spirit; his passion was contagious and caused many writers to continue to write Washington as American perfection.

### **Cooper's Identity-Changing Washington**

James Fenimore Cooper's Washington figure takes on multiple roles in *The Spy* and is constantly changing his identity. Bryan points out that "the first important effort [to portray Washington in literature] was that of James Fenimore Cooper in *The Spy*, published in 1821" (15). Cooper takes a more creative position on Washington's character and frequently uses the Washington character to simply move the plot forward, rather than having Washington play a significant role within the plot. Bryan additionally

notes that Cooper's version of Washington is more of a "deus ex machina" than an effective and well-structured character. Disguised as a traveler known as Harper, Washington ultimately teams up with the patriotic Frances Wharton to save the life of her British brother while also securing and finalizing Frances's marriage to the heroic Major Peyton Dunwoodie and keeping Harvey Birch's spy status secret. Throughout the novel, readers are wrapped up in the story of the Whartons as they desperately try to convince the rebel army to spare the life of their Loyalist son and brother, Captain Henry Wharton. When Henry first arrives at his family's home, having snuck across the neutral ground to visit them, another visitor, Harper, has already sought refuge with the family. The first description of Harper is regal, but there are no indications, for the Wharton family or the reader, that this is the great George Washington: "His dress, being suited to the road, was simple and plain, but such as was worn by the higher class of his countrymen; he wore his own hair, dressed in a manner that gave a military air to his appearance, and which was rather heightened by his erect and conspicuously graceful carriage. His whole appearance was so impressive and so decidedly that of a gentleman" (1: 10). Mr. Harper, as he introduces himself, alarms the family because he skillfully prevents them from learning anything about him or his political leanings. It is not until the end of the novel that we realize George Washington has been an active character in the novel and not just a faceless name that approves hangings or sends prisoners to their death. The Whartons spend much of their time trying to access or communicate with Washington and the mysterious Harper in order to plead the innocence of their family member, but these pleas are met with constant failure; their lack of success soon starts to have a negative effect on Frances Wharton, the strong female supporter of America's cause. Frances finally finds

herself accosting Washington for showing no mercy to her brother: “‘I have been deceived in him,’ cried Frances. ‘He is not the savior of his country; but a cold and merciless tyrant. Oh! Peyton, Peyton! how have you misled me in his character!’” (3: 90). Frances’s outburst is one of the only negative reactions to Washington; nevertheless, Cooper knows better than to criticize too harshly America’s hero and Frances later takes back her reprimands against the general.

Cooper’s heroine is the only female character who is given the opportunity of interacting with the great Washington; in fact, Frances converses with Washington much more than any of his male soldiers or characters. While the Whartons stay with Henry to await his sentence, Frances climbs a steep mountain after having seen a hut and Harvey Birch on the hilltop. When she arrives, the only person at the hut is Harper, who agrees to help her. Completely unaware that she is in the presence of the great general, as Frances and Harper walk down the mountain, she felt “that she was supported by a man of no common stamp. The firmness of his step and the composure of his manner, seemed to indicate a mind that was settled and resolved” (3: 202-3). As Harper/Washington sends Frances on her mission to save her brother, we see a blend between the two types of Washingtons that Bryan alludes to – the wise, poised military leader shares a moment of humanity with his young companion:

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

blowing of one who hopes yet to meet you in happier days.” . . . Harper bent and pressed a paternal kiss upon her forehead. (3: 204)

Harper’s dialogue with Frances is one of Washington’s finest moments in *The Spy* and is the first major indication that Harper is actually Washington incognito. But Washington’s moment of paternal kindness is a sweet cover up for what Cooper does not want us to remember about Washington’s aristocratic past.

Harper/Washington is described as “a tall and extremely graceful person, of apparently fifty years of age; his countenance evinced a settled composure and dignity; his nose was straight, and approaching to Grecian; his eye, quiet, thoughtful, and rather melancholy; the mouth and lower part of the face expressive of decision and much character” (1: 9-10). Unlike the Washington figures in the later texts, Cooper’s Washington operates “behind the scenes” and rarely plays a significant role in the text, except when Frances accidentally stumbles upon him as she sets out to discover the hut on the mountaintop. Crawford argues that the image of Washington played such a large role in American literature because the public was searching for a heroic American figure – and the father of the country was the obvious man to successfully fill that role. Crawford additionally claims that “[i]n this novel, Cooper produces an image of George Washington, patriarchy and gender that exemplifies (and begins to define) post-revolution anxieties regarding authority and control” (61). Romantic notions of domesticity and femininity overpower Washington/Harper’s role – he seems less concerned with defeating the British and more focused on making sure everyone enjoys a happy ending, which includes securing the marriage between Frances and Major

Dunwoodie. The reassuring Washington figure was a welcome image considering the numerous tensions and uncertainty that America was facing in reality.

Bryan notes that many of Cooper's readers, although they enjoyed the book overall, were extremely displeased with the way Washington was depicted in *The Spy*. Readers remarked that "it was unnatural and disrespectful to show the Commander-in-Chief, unattended and far from his forces, hiding in a hut to interview a peddler-spy" (200). This tension with Washington acting as a lower-class character alludes to the issue of class in America and the unease many Americans felt as it became easier for those not born aristocratic to climb rungs on the social ladder. Yet on the other hand, Cooper's use of Washington as a devious spy of sorts who does not bring along attendants, specifically slaves, provides an image of Washington that many readers choose to ignore about the novel and about Washington's real person. It is odd to think that readers would have enjoyed and accepted Cooper's Washington more had he [Cooper] included slaves to travel alongside Washington. Connecting back to Washington's background as a British subject and a Virginian aristocrat leads us to wonder why Washington, "one of Virginia's wealthiest and most powerful citizens," even as Harper, travels alone (Pogue 3). Had Washington actually been moving about the country, he certainly would have been accompanied by a servant; even in his disguise, as a white gentleman he also would have had a servant or attendant that traveled with him. But Washington's opinions on slavery are completely ignored, though the real-life Washington dealt with slavery even as the general of the American army. David Waldstreicher reminds us that in 1775, Washington outlawed the enlistment of African Americans. Although "[o]n December 30, 1775, Washington partially reversed his decision, allowing free blacks, but not slaves, to



enlist,” we still get a sense of racism in Washington’s actual character, despite his “growing antipathy to the institution of slavery” that he developed later in his life (Waldstreicher 542, Pogue 4). Had Cooper included such a companion, the humane and paternal Washington figure that Cooper creates might have resulted in an even greater outburst from his reading audience and might have created a completely different conversation arising from Washington’s depiction in the novel.

Perhaps Washington plays a more minor role in Cooper’s work than the other writers of the nineteenth century because Cooper never actually met him in person. Intimate friends with John Jay and Lafayette, Cooper chose to write about them more vividly than Washington and even used one of Jay’s stories about the Revolution as inspiration for his novel:

Appropriately, *The Spy* was based on a story told Cooper one day by John Jay when Cooper, the former chief justice and governor, his son William . . . were sitting on the piazza of the Jay home . . . The point of the tale, for Cooper as for Jay, involved a pleasurable surprise that the unknown prototype of Harvey Birch, the peddler-spy, a man of low social and economic station, who served Jay as a spy and obtained much valuable information from the British at great cost and personal suffering to himself, had . . . drawn back as if offended and refused all payment because the country needed all its means. (Beard 88)

Cooper, unlike many of the other writers who chose to write about Washington, had intimate relationships with many of the Revolutionary War heroes, which served as a means of comparison for the person he imagined Washington to be. Because the other

authors had no high profile war friends to create parallels with, their idea of Washington was crafted on a grander and more glamorous scale. Cooper also may not have felt that he had the right to comment on Washington's opinions regarding slavery.

In Cooper's story, Birch and Harper/Washington have a close relationship and frequently work together, despite Birch's lower-class status. At the end of the novel, Birch is led into Washington's office and is offered money by Washington but adamantly refuses to accept payment that could instead be used to benefit the struggling young country and aid in the war. As Washington explains that Birch must continue the façade, he appears pained that Birch will not receive the praise and congratulations that should come from all he's sacrificed for his country. In this scene, the image of Washington diverges slightly from the untouchable Washington figure that appears in the majority of romances about the Revolution. Here, Washington becomes human, much like in Sedgwick's novel, and is a hero who hurts for the numerous men who are martyrs for the cause of freedom. Another humane and compassionate image of Washington occurs near the final chapter of *The Spy* when Harvey Birch has a secret meeting with Washington. Washington humbly thanks Birch for his service as a spy, explaining, "[r]emember . . . that in me you will always have a secret friend; but openly I cannot know you" (3: 294). Prior to this moment, Birch and Harper team up again to come up with a plan to free Henry Wharton. Beard asserts that Harper/Washington "participates in the action as a *deus ex machina* from an untouchable moral and physical height. He embodies the loftiest ideal of disinterested justice tempered with mercy; and when, from his isolated mountaintop hut, he directs the escape of a British officer unjustly convicted as a spy, his motive is pure, god-like, beyond censure" (89). Washington/Harper is conveniently

present to constantly bail the other characters out of difficult, frequently even life-threatening, incidents.

Washington's major scene comes near the finale of *The Spy* in a secret meeting with his comrade and spy, Harvey Birch. Such a scene offers readers another questionable experience with Washington as he willfully and blatantly tells Harvey that he will deny knowing him if he gets caught by the British. Such a characteristic is a stark contrast from the compassionate and heroic Washington that is overtly written in most historical romances. In a heartfelt, humble, and patriotic response to Washington's offer of payment, Harvey refuses the payment, asking "[w]hat is there about me to mourn, when such men as your excellency risk their all for our country?" (3: 289). Harvey's response again highlights the height of Washington's reputation to Americans, but Cooper takes this moment to make Washington an even greater hero as Washington blesses Harvey and promises him an everlasting friendship, while at the same time letting Harvey know that he is basically on his own. During the War of 1812, when Harvey returns to the scene of battle, he gives the ultimate sacrifice for his country and dies with a note from Washington that evinces Harvey's faithfulness and great service to the country, the highest praise and ultimate prize for a patriot soldier. Cooper's view of an emotional and thankful Washington provides an alternative view to the stoic, older image of Washington that abounds in modern representations of the founding father.

### **Lippard's Radical Washington**

As time created greater distance between the American Revolution and the American Renaissance period, Washington's reputation shifted from awe and fear to an

exaggerated mythological perception of his character. George Lippard, whose “stories are marred by sensationalism, voluptuousness, and preposterous Gothic elements,” takes Bancroft’s popular imagery of Washington and expands it even further, creating a drastically different Washington from other writers (Bryan 214). Lippard often writes about history as he preferred it, as evidenced in his *Washington and His Generals* (1847), which can be blamed for many of the misleading legends of the American Revolution that we still believe today. In *Blanche of Brandywine* (1846), Lippard asserts “[i]t is my solemn duty, to fling off the covering of frost work, with which posterity, has enshrouded Washington; to show the man, as he was, all feeling, and enthusiasm and all MAN” (160). This proclamation clearly reveals Lippard’s intention to expose Washington as a person, rather than a convoluted, romantic vision of the general. Although Lippard includes many of the historical events that took place during the Revolution, he romanticizes the characters and inner plots to create enticing drama as well as to highlight the character of Washington, who, based on many of Lippard’s novels and his own political history, was a man Lippard greatly looked up to. According to Bryan, Lippard “devoted more pages to the treatment of Washington than any other writer of fiction up to the present day” (214). Like Sedgwick, Lippard mythologizes the father of our country with words like “savior,” “redeemer,” and his soldier characters dramatically exclaim each time they enter into battle, “Vengeance, Washington, and the Right!” (104). But beneath these descriptions of valor and praise are covert implications scholarship about Washington in historical romances has overlooked. Lippard, who is known for his political ideology that supports the working man (referred to by scholars such as Sean Wilentz as artisan republicanism), puts Washington on a pedestal, but then questions

Washington's heroic image with commentary and reminders of his aristocratic background, provocatively linking Washington with imperialist ventures that were taking place during the novel's publication.

Lippard's first introduction to Washington resembles descriptions proffered by Cooper and Sedgwick: "a young Virginia Colonel, named Washington – aye, George Washington – a fine, tall, commanding officer, who rode his horse like a king and looked like an emperor-born from hat to heel" (Lippard 37). Bryan claims that "[b]efore 1865 most American writers agreed that Washington's character was perfect, but they were not completely unified with regard to what constituted perfection" (16). However, Cooper, Sedgwick, and Lippard all seem to agree on many of the same qualities that make Washington a national hero – courage, compassion, wit, and an extremely deep love for his country. While Lippard does portray Washington in those same ways, he also takes a different perspective by destabilizing the myth that has been built up around Washington and his reputation. Although most of *Blanche of Brandywine*'s plot does not revolve around Washington, he does play an important role in the battles that Lippard highlights and his descriptions are unique in that they constantly refer, in some way, to his aristocratic background, such as the first description of Washington. This imagery of Washington links him to nobility with terms like "king" and "emperor." Considering Lippard's devotion to the working class, it is shocking that he calls attention to the details of Washington that clearly conflict with his derision for the aristocracy. Despite such details, Lippard successfully writes his Washington character to appeal to his reading audience, and his use of pathos in Washington's actions and monologues inspires American pride and sympathy for the ordeals its patriots went through during the

Revolution. This Washington neither parallels the stern and strict Washington in *The Linwoods* nor the clever, mysterious Washington of *The Spy*.

However, Lippard does not merely write Washington as an untouchable hero. Whereas Sedgwick's Washington gives off an aura of stoicism and sternness, Lippard's Washington unearths deep emotions and a painstaking love for his country, freedom, and his men. In many scenes with Washington in the spotlight, we see him overlooking the bloody battlefield with tears streaming down his face, regretting the loss of so many lives, yet proud that Americans are dedicated and willing to sacrifice themselves for freedom from tyranny. Lippard also writes Washington as a man who is prone to the temptations of ordinary men, albeit Washington is easily able to overcome the enticements of the British king. In the midst of the many plots, Lippard includes a detailed account of Washington being offered the position of duke by the king, whom he refers to as "the Idiot-King of England," a sentiment that Herman Melville mirrors in *Israel Potter*, if he will disown the American cause (166). This scene is where Lippard's Washington begins to drastically differ from others who wrote about Washington. Without even considering such a bargain, Washington disgustedly announces

I have just been thinking of the ten thousand brave men, who have laid down their lives, in this cause. I have endeavored to recall the horrible details of each battle-field, where brave and virtuous men, sank down to death, fighting for their native land. I have tried to bring up before me, the memories . . . where your arms, were crimsoned in the blood of peaceful men. . . . And your King, wishes me to barter the blood of my countrymen

and the whitening bones of her battle fields, for the bauble of a coronet,  
the empty jingle of a title! (166, 165)

Lippard later gets carried away with the possibility of Washington accepting such an offer and segues into an alternate reality where Washington accepts the title of Duke Washington and rules America as a monarch, giving up everything that he and his soldiers had fought for. Rather than simply showing Washington's loyalty and courage, we get to see Washington's human side that is faced with decisions, challenges, and the burden of men's deaths on his shoulders.

However, there were troubling aspects to Washington's legacy, such as his aristocratic background. Lippard seems to be struggling in his perception of Washington; on one hand, Lippard regards Washington as a selfless hero. On the other hand, Washington's myth represented everything that Lippard was against. Lippard's main goal in much of his fiction was to "demythologize the upper classes . . . to expose and debunk aristocratic life and to sentimentalize and glorify the life of the humble" (Fiedler). Although Lippard often seems to sympathize with Washington, he also struggles between his own working-class perspective and Washington's origins by inflating his image and then dispelling it with the nightmare scene (which will be discussed in the following section) or references to nobility. Lippard "empathized with the poor and forgotten. He was a fervent Jacksonian Democrat and viewed the moneyed classes as parasites pulling the nation from its true destiny" and eventually chose to write "about the American Revolution, specifically the contrast between the heroism of the commanders of the American forces and the self-serving public officials who assumed power once independence was secured" (Gura 84-5). Lippard's contradiction in beliefs appears

during another temptation scene when Washington shows his knowledge and abidance of the unwritten rules of warfare, or “[t]he gentleman's law, which the British more or less have come to represent” (Marder). Lippard, when he meets Howe in the forest, allows him to escape rather than taking him prisoner, which seems to reflect Washington’s aristocratic and British background.

General Howe comes onto American ground to meet with Washington, who makes Howe aware that he could easily be taken prisoner because he has dared to enter his enemy’s territory. Although Howe could be an easy target, Washington allows him to leave because of how easy it would be to capture him: “To be plain, with you, General Howe, you are in my power, but I cannot take an ungenerous advantage of an enemy. Yonder lies your way; it needs but five minutes gallop, across the meadow, and over yonder hills, and you are in the heart of the British army” (163). Lippard could have ceased his implicit praise of Washington at this point, but he supplements the conversation with an additional temptation that only adds to Washington’s humility and loyalty to America, and reflects the Biblical story in the Gospels of Christ’s temptation in the desert by Satan. Howe arrives with a proposition from the king, which is similar to a brief remark by Cooper – “some said Washington wanted to be king himself” – a statement that is quickly refuted by many characters in that novel (Cooper 336). Howe, in Lippard’s version, arrives with a message that if Washington betrays his country and takes an oath of loyalty for Britain, the king promises to crown him Duke of the young country, second in command to the king himself. Washington, of course, refuses and is extremely insulted by the offer. The audience of such a selfless scene could certainly be swayed into believing Washington was a godly being.



Behind this selfless image, however, is a Virginia aristocrat, and Lippard physically exposes this aristocratic heritage when Washington comes face to face with General Howe, who offers Washington the Dukedom from the king: “It was strange, to see the likeness which his face bore to the countenance of Washington. His features were cast in the same massive mould; his brow, bold and thoughtful, his nose prominent, his mouth determined, his chin resolute. Even his hair was arranged like Washington’s, after the fashion of the time” (162-3). General Howe, who had familial connections to the crown, is an interesting choice for a direct comparison, not only because Howe and Washington are direct enemies, but because of Howe’s royal heritage; Lippard makes such a parallel in order to remind his readers of Washington’s origins, as well. As if these reminders are not enough, Lippard goes even further when Howe explains to Washington the king’s offer of Duke of the colonies. In a rather snide remark, Lippard notes that such a title was an exciting offer for a “*simple* Virginia gentleman” (165 italics mine). Such a remark is a subtle reminder to his readers that Washington was anything but simple.

Lippard’s depiction of Washington in his interaction with Howe and in personal, reflective monologues in the forest radically diverges from the Washingtons depicted in other romances and histories, and even strays drastically from how Lippard paints Washington’s character throughout the rest of the novel as he tussles with Washington’s legacy. Lippard, much like Sedgwick, frequently compares Washington to God and includes religious language and images in his commentary: “Hither comes George Washington, in the name of God and freedom” (185). Lippard highlights the relationship Washington shares with God, a method that would have greatly appealed to the religious

audience of the nineteenth century. In one dramatic moment, Washington appears more human than hero as he pleads for his country and soldiers in prayer:

Merciful Father! The contest has been dark and bloody. Armies have sunk to death, in this cause; the bones of the dead have whitened every battle field. Massacre, and wrong, and outrage, have tracked their footsteps, over the land, in the blood of an innocent people. Now, O God, let the humblest of thy servants beseech Thee, that war may pass from this land! Thy name has been with me, as a sword and a shield, in the darkest hours of this contest! In the battle, in the triumph, and in the defeat, in camp and in field, I have called upon Thee, and heard thine answer in the death cry and the battle shout! (161)

Scholars have failed to find any proof that Washington was a deeply religious man; nevertheless, to appeal to a pious audience, Lippard's Washington exhibits himself to have a very close relationship to God. Despite giving a very human depiction of Washington, Lippard then immediately contrasts the vision with one of heroics and ultimate sacrifice as Washington pleads for God to take his life in exchange for the country's freedom.

Throughout *Blanche of Brandywine* we get conflicting images of Washington, a clear indication that Lippard was personally struggling with the discrepancy between Washington's inflated myth as the founder of the U.S. and his aristocratic background (celebration of which conflicted with Lippard's own radical democratic tendencies). While Lippard's inner conflict is evident in his varying depictions of Washington, a

dream/nightmare sequence that deals with Washington's military decisions best evinces Lippard's struggle in this regard.

### **Washington's Legacy and the (Imperialist) American Dream**

Lippard devotes an entire chapter of *Blanche of Brandywine* to a dream/nightmare that imagines various scenarios of Washington's life based on fictitious endings to the Revolution had Washington been a traitor to his country or been captured by the British. This dream may appear odd and insignificant (even today the dream is completely ignored in the meager amount of Lippard scholarship); however, Lippard emphasizes its importance: "it is a dream with a meaning, a phantasm with a moral" (167). The dream sequence opens with a cheering crowd standing around a marble palace in Philadelphia. The year is 1800, and *Duke* Washington emerges from the palace beneath a sea of British banners. The dream fades and a new image appears, but this time with Washington in the palace of St. James in the company of aristocracy. Lippard describes the flags and trophies of Britain's conquests that grace the palace hallways; King George III and his viceroy, Duke Washington, suddenly convene in the middle of the room and announce the end of the Revolution, which Britain has won. The dream then becomes dark. The next setting is Tower Hill in London, where a scaffold is surrounded by a crowd. The narrator homes in on George Washington, who awaits his execution. Washington refuses to ask forgiveness; rather, he prays for his country and is immediately beheaded. The dream changes to its final form, becoming chaotic as it ends with an image of Washington's decaying head, nailed to the doors of Independence Hall.

Lippard is often morbid and gruesome, particularly when he includes dream/nightmare scenes in his novels (*The Quaker City*, his most popular novel published in 1844, contains a moralistic apocalyptic dream); nevertheless, the macabre content of such a scene should not be overlooked. In Lippard's introduction to *Blanche of Brandywine*, he tells readers that "in the book they were about to read, he had moved from the horrors of the present to the glories of the past," a small nod to the issues, such as imperialism, that were on Americans' minds (Ratner, Kaufman, and Teeter, Jr. 105). Intertwined with Lippard's accusations against Britain's imperialism are graphic images of Washington's fate in varying instances. Immediately after Lippard writes the temptation scenario of Washington accepting the dukedom from the king, he includes another scenario that depicts the possibility of Washington being defeated and captured by the British. To focus on the tragedy of such an incident, Lippard gives very precise details about "the fate of George Washington, had he fallen into the power of the British king" (171). In this vision, Washington is led onto a scaffold and, repeating the parallelism between Washington and Christ, is sentenced to execution by the king, an eerily similar scene to Christ's crucifixion, except that Washington will be beheaded. Like Christ's accusers, Washington's executioners "strip the warrior's coat from his shoulders, and he stands erect, with his bared neck ready for the stroke" (171). Right before Washington's beheading, a priest arrives to convince him "to repent his foul sin, of revolt and treason," but rather than submitting, Washington, like Christ, gave "[o]ne brief prayer to his God, with uplifted eyes, one brief prayer for his country, now bleeding, in her bondage, and then, he kneels. . . . Washington, kneeling on his scaffold, is like a God reposing on his shrine" (171). This image and the final dream scene of Washington's

head nailed to a door are intended as attacks against Britain's violence and conquest of America, but their hypocrisy strikes a modern reader. America's concurrent involvement in the imperialist Mexican-American War belies the implication that the United States was committed to the simplicity and virtue associated with classical republics.

Lippard encourages his audience to notice the importance of the moral from this dream sequence; however, Lippard himself seems unaware of some of the implications of this dream/nightmare. While the focus of the sequence of dream scenarios is Washington, Lippard alludes numerous times to imperialism, although most of these allusions are accusations against the British. As Lippard describes the British flag waving in the breeze, he includes details of "its colors of blood sweeping gaily into the clear blue sky" (168). Major imperial conquests took place during the first half of the nineteenth century and were fresh in the minds of American readers and authors, including Lippard. In 1830 Andrew Jackson signed The Indian Removal Act which forced Native Americans living east of the Mississippi River to relocate to the west. Several years later, the country became involved in the Mexican-American War due to the U.S.'s annexation of Texas, which ultimately supplemented the country with additional territory and extended its borders all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Although these two events encouraged the idea of Manifest Destiny, they also meant displacing a plethora of people from their homes. Andy Doolen points out that many opinions about these events were kept silent by Americans: "[p]eriod categories are anti-imperial; the 'Republican Period' and the 'Age of Democracy' have always advanced a hegemonic view that imperial practices and values were either absent or merely nascent in the evolution of the US" (77). Lippard, however, was very much aware of such events and

avidly supported America's entry into war with Mexico. . . . He argued that war would expand American boundaries and provide greater opportunity for every man to own his own land. . . . He also assured his readers that the war proved the superiority of the 'American race.' . . . This new struggle for territory also would be therapeutic for the troubled American character, plagued as it was by the self-serving values of the marketplace and the greed of its political bosses. (Ratner, Kaufman, and Teeter Jr. 107)

Lippard's support of the Mexican-American War cannot in hindsight be easily reconciled with many of his other beliefs, such as his passionate involvement regarding the rights and working conditions for working-class Americans.

Lippard's "The Dream" chapter is troubling for several reasons. Within it, we see Lippard struggling with several conflicting ideas and beliefs – his artisan republicanism, Washington's legacy, and the imperialist ventures of his time period. *Blanche of Brandywine* was published in 1846, the very same time that the Mexican-American War and westward expansion were taking place. Doolen claims that "we have a standard chronology of American imperialism that begins in the mid-nineteenth century with the acquisitions of Oregon and California and ends with the Spanish-American War at the turn of the century. This evidence of continental expansion, a growing central state, increased militarism, and a distinctly American colonialism at the turn of the century anchors the historical narrative of American empire" (78). References to American imperialism are absent from the other historical romances; however, Lippard was a passionate advocate for expansion. Unfortunately, what he failed to account for in his

support was the incredible number of people who would ultimately be displaced by the United States' seizure of additional territory. Shelley Streeby asserts that

[e]ven though Lippard's (re)vision of American Protestantism is anticapitalist, that anticapitalism sometimes takes imperialist and/or nativist forms. When Lippard suggests that imperialist policies in the southwest might free up more land for workers, as he does in *Legends of Mexico* or *Bel of Prairie Eden*, he conveniently forgets about or at worst justifies the displacement and dispossession of Indians, Mexicans, and Spaniards that this plan will require. (Streeby "Haunted Houses")

Interestingly enough, Lippard's dream sequence shows Lippard struggling with his ideas about imperialism and about Washington's legacy. A harsh critique of imperialism shows up in the nightmare scene of Washington's acceptance of the Dukedom. Taking us inside the palace, Lippard points out the "triumphs of the British empire," which appear in the forms of banners and trophies from places all over the world that the British have conquered (169). In addition to the flags of several countries, Lippard also points out the weapons from many nations, including tomahawks, which are "the proofs of her [Britain's] crimes" (169). Beneath Lippard's critiques of Britain's conquests lies a potential analysis of America's current adventures in Mexico. The details that Lippard includes in this novel sound like critiques of imperialism; however, based on other writings by Lippard, he clearly was a proponent of the Mexican-American War because it would provide additional land for immigrants and the working-class to expand.

Streeby's analysis of Lippard's novels on the Mexican-American War, such as *Legends of Mexico* (1847) and *Bel of Prairie Eden: A Romance of Mexico* (1848),

establishes Lippard's overt endorsement of American imperialist expansion. Streeby asserts that Lippard "enthusiastically supported" the Mexican-American War and believed it was an opportunity for immigrants and the working class to expand ("American Sensations" 8). Unlike other sensationalist writers, Lippard "was more approving of the project of US empire building, despite the doubts and fears about imperial expansion that surface in his war novels" (Streeby "American Sensations" 8-9). In *Blanche of Brandywine* Lippard makes numerous references to the negative effects of imperialism and colonization, though these references do not match his actual feelings toward expansion. Prior to the scene in which Lippard compares Washington to Jesus, he describes the beauty of the Brandywine valley in a way that sounds very much anti-imperialistic: "[w]hen these five old oaks were saplings, there were gallant red men in the land, stern warriors, whose religion, was honor and love and revenge. . . . Hundreds of years have past [sic], since then; the red men have been crushed beneath the blood-stained feet of Christian civilization" (159). The sentiment expressed here seems at odds with the effects of the Indian Removal Act, pushed through Congress by another of Lippard's democratic heroes, Andrew Jackson. Celebrating George Washington in novels that were published during a period in history that contained heavy imperialist violence was a way of directing readers' attention away from these events and recalling images of grandeur and patriotism. But in Lippard's conflicted dream sequence, the disjunction between the virtuous republic of the Revolutionary era and the imperialist aggressor of the antebellum period finds troubled expression.

Bryan notes that out of one hundred and fifty novels that dealt with Washington's time period, only a little over thirty actually included an appearance by the General (190).



Bryan also claims that “[f]ictional portraits of General Washington, taken as a group, make him something of a paradox. On the one hand, he is the perfect military leader, poised and wise in council, energetic and efficient at his desk, magnificent on horseback, formal, impersonal, Jovian. On the other hand, he has a heart of gold, and apparently spends a large portion of his time comforting the widow and the orphan, the female in distress, and the dying soldier” (192). Although many of these same descriptions are included in Lippard’s novel, he diverges radically from these depictions in the dream sequence, thus also creating Washington as a paradox. In the scene where Washington meets King George in the palace hallway, Lippard states “[t]he humble Virginia planter has become a Duke, the rebel has been transformed into the Viceroy of the King whom he defied, the Father of his country, into the courtier of a tyrant” (169). Such a description of Washington registers Lippard’s discomfort with the change in American values that an imperialist outlook represented. Always concerned about the virtue of America, Lippard viewed the “Mexican War as an antidote to decline in civic virtue, honor, and public morality. . . . The ‘crusade,’ he believed, was double-faceted, bearing on the one hand the promise of America’s revolutionary mission and on the other the redemptive qualities needed to awaken Americans from the sleep of avarice and dissipation” (Johannsen 200). The impossibility of reconciling this notion of the Mexican-American War with its imperialist overtones surfaces in Lippard’s bizarre and unique dream sequence involving Duke Washington. Rather than being concerned with freedom, Americans were solely focused on the acquisition of wealth, even if it came from a morally indefensible war.

In this dream we see Lippard trying to come to terms with Washington's mythology and his problematic aristocratic background, along with the conflict between Lippard's own support of the Mexican-American War and his devotion to the downtrodden who had no voice in society. Britain, again scorned rather than serving as a model country, represents the problematic connections between imperialistic and materialistic obsession, which Lippard saw increasing in many Americans. Trees argues that the "desire for gold and European finery was also commonplace in American society as Americans sought the very British products that they condemned" (Trees 247). Lippard offers no solid solutions to the questions of imperialism and materialism that he found so troubling. To deter his readers from becoming too focused on these vices, using Britain as the negative model, Lippard ends his dream sequence on a positive note, invoking George Washington's legacy to inspire American patriotism and remind them of the values that America was founded on. Lippard writes: "[i]n the hearts of millions, the name of Washington dwells, like a saint in its shrine. Throughout this wide land, whenever a mother would ask God's blessing on her boy, she links, with her prayer, the name of Washington . . . we, the People of the United States, send that name, morning, noon and night . . . as incense to the skies, a sweet smelling savor to the throne of Almighty God" (172). Despite the problems in Washington's character and background that Lippard focuses on, he finally returns to the comforting Washington myth in order to remind his readers of the main ideologies of the Revolution.

## Conclusion

Perhaps Washington is not as perfect as Sedgwick, Bancroft, and numerous other writers make him appear. When it comes to Washington's identity and background, writers, particularly those in the nineteenth century, completely ignored Washington's aristocratic past, primarily focusing on his heroism in the American Revolution and sticking to tales of his courage rather than his livelihood. It is a well-known fact that Washington was a wealthy Virginia gentleman and slave owner. In *The Linwoods*, Sedgwick makes note of Washington's Virginian aristocracy when she details a friendship between Washington and his old Virginian neighbor, the Loyalist Mr. Ruthven, but any reference to his background ends there.

Any negative depictions of Washington are usually left out of historical romances. Trees asserts that Washington frequently had to deal with angry, bitter soldiers who were overlooked for promotion and that he "worried constantly about the problem. As he [Washington] wrote of one group, 'They murmur, brood over their discontent, and have lately shown a disposition to enter into seditious combinations'" (247). Many of these moments were completely forgotten in historical romances, as well. With the presence of racial, class, gender, and imperialistic tensions abounding after the end of the War of 1812, Americans needed someone to look to. Washington's death in 1799 "dealt a dreadful blow to public morale, leaving Americans feeling leaderless, orphaned, and insecure," and with the arrival of new problems, "the nation seemed adrift and helpless in a world once again at war. They needed to believe that he was and would continue to be there for them" (Lengel ix). Sedgwick, Cooper, and Lippard fall into the same traps as other writers of historical romances in building up Washington's spotless reputation.

Nevertheless, each author also exposes the faults and/or weaknesses in Washington's character that reflect the tensions of the period and puts a crack in the mythological Washington that other historical writers created.

## CHAPTER THREE

Neither with Us, Nor Against Us: Class, Cowboys, and the Skinners in James Fenimore

Cooper's *The Spy* and Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *The Linwoods*

### **Introduction**

The nineteenth century experienced numerous changes in terms of the nation's identity, the women's movement, and slavery. With the rapid population increase caused by factories and the massive influx of immigrants, class differences also became a major concern for many Americans, particularly the upper classes who realized that their social standing was being questioned and challenged. Although America's forefathers believed in founding the country on the ideas of equal rights (at least for property owning white men), in the early to mid-nineteenth century their eighteenth-century, republican assumptions ran up against the more radical egalitarianism of a nascent labor movement. In conjunction with a growing political consciousness within the working class, Andrew Jackson's presidency led to a diminishing of class divisions. Jacksonian democracy challenged and changed the idea of Jeffersonian democracy that granted government control via the educated elite. Jackson and his supporters not only disagreed with the older European, genteel style of government, they also worked to extend the vote to almost all free white males, providing power and a voice to those who had been denied such an opportunity under previous presidents.

The nation's first great awareness of its financial position came with the Panic of 1819. This event was "the first widespread financial crisis in American history and a watershed moment in the nation's growing awareness of its own complex and often

uneasy relationship to commerce” (Anthony 111). Following the panic a few years later, the Nullification Crisis of 1832 also led to many economic debates during the nineteenth century, particularly between northerners and southerners, who felt that the tariffs implemented by John Quincy Adams were unconstitutional and benefited the factory settings of New England while hurting the agrarian culture of the South. Although numerous challenges to the Constitution would arise as Americans began to address concerns over slavery, the Nullification Crisis was the first drastic questioning of the infamous document. According to Emily VanDette, “[e]ven after the crisis was resolved, Americans grappled with their concepts of the well-being and solidarity of the nation, as they tried to come to terms with the status of states’ rights and the extent of the federal government’s power” (“Family” 60). The Crisis caused many Americans, particularly the lower class and slaves, to assert a newfound vision of their own rights.

David S. Reynolds asserts that during the 1820s and 30s, “[w]idening class divisions alarmed those who contrasted the increasing wealth of the so-called idle rich with the hardscrabble lives of workers. ‘There appears to exist two distinct classes,’ announced a labor paper in 1828; ‘the rich and the poor; the oppressor and the oppressed; those who live by their own labor, and they that live by the labor of others’” (*Waking Giant* 64-5). Two major authors of the period, James Fenimore Cooper and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, use their historical novels to take on the class tensions that were brewing during the decades Reynolds refers to. These American authors reverted back to writing about obvious class divisions to signal either their discomfort, or their acceptance, of the increasingly unstable class divisions in their own period. Cooper felt it was unacceptable that poor whites, immigrants, and possibly even slaves, could somehow

climb the social ladder and become equals to those who were born into gentility or money. Other writers, such as Sedgwick, wrote about class as a way to make lower-class Americans aware of the fact that it was possible, and even acceptable, to achieve a higher social standing, and that Americans who were born into higher positions should take the opportunity to help those who were not so fortunate and teach them how to reach a higher rung on the social ladder. Although Cooper and Sedgwick take different routes, they both incorporate Skinners to reflect on and critique concerns about social class.

Cooper, writing mostly during the 1820s, prior to the rise of Jackson and his supporters, has a distinctively different style and approach to the use of the American Revolution as a literary trope when compared against a later writer like Sedgwick, who supported many of the changes that America was experiencing. Cooper, like Washington Irving and his other contemporaries, “left America for Europe during the pre-Jacksonian period, spent a long time abroad, and returned during the Jacksonian phase, discovering profound cultural changes. The America they had left was, in their view, stable, structured and agrarian, harking back to the traditional world of the founding fathers. The America they found upon returning in the 1830s was, they thought, crass, materialistic, unstable, ever-shifting, and characterized by the passions of mobs” (Reynolds *Waking Giant* 239). Cooper felt extremely threatened by the changes in the country and makes his opinion very clear in *The Spy* (1821) that the elimination of class distinction will lead to chaos and disorder. Unlike Sedgwick, Cooper does not encourage in *The Spy* the blurring of social status boundaries or the mixing of people of different class positions through marriage. Industrialism, capitalism, immigration, and expansion were a harsh push against the aristocratic society of early America.

Sarah Robbins, who coins the term “benevolent literacy narrative” to describe a “subgenre of the domestic literacy narrative” which contains novels about women teaching or instructing the working class, argues that “[b]enevolent literacy narratives were closely bound up with Jacksonian-era anxiety over the rise of the common man and fears of uneducated immigrants’ potential for disrupting the republic” (10). Such novels struck a nerve with those who felt uneasy over the breaking down of class barriers and were not popular with those proponents of a rigid social order. The historical fiction that revolved around the American Revolution, however, was also largely bound up with Jacksonian-era anxiety over class divisions crumbling. Cooper clearly voices his concern over the rise of the poor and common man, but Sedgwick in *The Linwoods* (1835) takes a much gentler and welcoming approach. Cooper’s novel attempts to keep everyone in their place, while Sedgwick encourages those of the lower class to strive for greater things and to challenge the norm that has been prevalent in America. Reynolds notes that Cooper

tried to resurrect the agrarian-republican world of his patriarchal father by writing novels and nonfiction in which he satirized contemporary America and praised laws and customs based on the traditions of the propertied elite. . . . He defended slavery and opposed universal manhood suffrage. . . . America, he declared, was fast becoming a “country with no principles, but party, no God, but money, and this too with very little sentiment, taste, breeding, or knowledge.” What was needed, he thought, was a return to the old republican notion of the gentleman-leader, who was “the natural



repository of the manners, tastes, tone, and . . . principles of a country.”

(*Waking Giant* 241)

Cooper needed someone to blame. Therefore, in addition to the presence of working-class characters such as Caesar and Katy Haynes, the Skinners, who appear frequently in *The Spy* and serve as more villainous characters than the British, receive Cooper’s animosity and show how Cooper believed America was threatened by a working-class group attempting to move up the financial ladder through nefarious means.

But the Skinners are not the only ones to represent economic inequality and social climbing in novels of the 1820s and 1830s set during the American Revolution.

Sedgwick’s main character in *The Linwoods*, Eliot Lee, goes beyond his humble means to become a highly respected rebel soldier (George Washington’s confidante) and marries the heroine who has been engaged to the wealthy British soldier since childhood. While Sedgwick still incorporates Skinners who act even more ruthlessly than Cooper’s Skinners, she does so with a different intended message. Sedgwick’s use of Skinners, much like her use of British characters, is an example of what Americans may become if too much emphasis is placed on the continuance of class divisions and the refusal to educate those of the lower classes. The Skinners and the British are threats to American society because both groups put so much emphasis on social status and financial gain. By renouncing the single-minded pursuit of wealth as an overriding social value, Sedgwick convinces her readers that such groups will not exist to harm the modern period. Sedgwick’s Skinners also serve as a threat to the nation because they lack the patriotism that she sought to revive in her readers.

### **Skinner and Cowboys**

With the rise of Jacksonian democracy, America during the mid-1800s saw a change in class divisions – the rise of a middle class eliminated extreme division between the rich and the poor. Lincoln Diamant notes that most of Cooper’s readers would have been “literate propertied classes” who would have had the remembrance of revolts, rebellions, and uprisings constantly in the back of their minds and who would have been shocked and appalled at the change they witnessed in America after the War of 1812; therefore, wealthy Americans, like Cooper, needed someone to blame (56). When historical novelists from the gentry class, such as Cooper, took on the subject of the American Revolution, *Skinner and Cowboys* provided a convenient outlet for their resentment against an increasingly powerful and vocal working class.

Even readers familiar with the history of the American Revolution may need some historical explanation for the prominence of *Skinner* in Cooper’s and Sedgwick’s novels. Diamant explains that “‘Skinner’ were simply the three battalions of British refugee volunteers raised by the fifty-year-old erstwhile attorney general of New Jersey, Brigadier General Cortlandt Skinner” (51). As he explores the origins of the *Skinner* and the myths that surround the group, it appears that it may be difficult to pinpoint exactly who the *Skinner* were and what they did. Barton Levi St. Armand describes the *Skinner* as “marauding renegades acting under the guise of American patriotism” (351). No matter who they were and what side they may or may not have pledged loyalty to, the importance of *Skinner and Cowboys* in the historical fiction of Cooper and Sedgwick provides one example of how class caused extreme tension to writers during the 1820s and 30s and is one means of putting that tension into literature. These working-class

groups of men can be divided into two separate groups – the Skinners, groups who frequently sided with the Americans, and the Cowboys, who were associated with the British. Summing up the eventual fate of Skinners in Cooper’s novel, James Franklin Beard explains that “[t]he Skinners, renegade Americans without loyalties, are exterminated in a hanging of such concentrated callousness that it seems to express a cosmic disdain for all lost violent souls” (90). Most American authors who chose to include events with the Skinners or Cowboys wrote dramatic and violent ends for these rebels who were so weak they could not even choose a side to fight on.

The presence of Skinners offers an interesting class division within Revolution novels. Rather than fighting, these men attacked and raided homes, women, straggling men, and even soldiers in order to obtain valuables. Easily bribed by the British or the Americans, these men could be convinced, for a price, to carry out business that was too menial and disrespectful for soldiers. Although the Skinners were often handy for this reason, they were also considered cowards for not taking a side. While the British army routinely mocked the under-fed, shoddily dressed American “country bumpkins,” the Skinners were certainly the lowest of the low. John M. McDonald, an historian during the 1850s, referred to the Skinners in a speech to the New York Historical Society as “lawless followers who hung loosely upon the skirts of either party” (qtd. in Diamant 57). Even decades after the Revolution, the Skinners were still stamped with a negative reputation.

Oddly enough, Diamant notes that there are no diaries, journals, or records of groups called Skinners from the Revolutionary era; instead, “references to [Colonel James] De Lancey’s Cowboys abound” (51). Therefore, the prevalence of these groups in

Cooper's and Sedgwick's novels makes their messages about class even more interesting because they found a need to create, or exaggerate, a low class to show the problems that arise from such unaffiliated people. Diamant additionally points out that John Jay gave Cooper most of his inspiration and information for *The Spy*, "[b]ut the word 'Skinner' is nowhere to be found in Jay's public or private correspondence" (52). Diamant also claims that "[w]ith such an enormous cast of unblemished heroes, the fictional villains necessary to make a good story were in short supply. Cooper's solution was to introduce the Skinners, a name he added . . . to the Hudson Valley lexicon as a synonym for American patriot irregulars" (53). It is certainly interesting that Cooper can be "blamed" for creating these lower-class misfits; however, Diamant may be incorrect in arguing that Cooper crafted the Skinners just to have exciting villains (the British soldiers were enough for that). Cooper's creation of the Skinners was an outlet for class discomfort and tension toward the rise of a middle class.

War always provides opportunity for dishonest actions and reprobates, so even if Cooper did come up with the name for these miscreants, their actual presence was real. The first non-fiction appearance of Skinners came out almost instantly in response to Cooper's novel and was the "sole firsthand reference to Skinners anywhere during the American Revolution" (Diamant 55). This "corrective description of Skinners" was written in the memoirs of Dr. James Thacher, who had served as a surgeon in the Continental army (54). Thacher writes,

*Some of each side* [emphasis supplied] have taken up arms, and become the most cruel and deadly foes. There *are-within the British lines-banditti* [emphasis supplied] consisting of lawless villains, who devote themselves

to the most cruel pillage and robbery among the defenceless inhabitants between the lines, many of whom they carry off to New York, after plundering their houses and farms. *These shameless marauders* have received the names of *Cow-boys* and *Skinnners*. [emphasis supplied] By their atrocious deeds they have become a scourge and terror to the people. (qtd. in Diamant 55)

Skinnners take part in the very practice Thacher describes in Cooper's *The Spy* and Sedgwick's *The Linwoods*, frequently burning down homes with families inside and taking advantage of women and children who have no way to defend themselves. While these authors create villains out of British soldiers, officers, and general characters, the Skinnners and Cowboys take over as the most fearsome and cruel presence in America.

The Skinnners and Cowboys are so contemptible that they willingly switch sides to save their own skins. In *The Spy*, when Harvey Birch and the Skinner are accosted by the British cowboy, the Skinner tries to persuade the man of his switch: "I have been a poor deluded man, who has been serving in the rebel army: but, thank God! I've lived to see the error of my ways, and am now come to make reparation by enlisting under the Lord's anointed" (3: 249). Rather than accepting such a wishy-washy soldier into his ranks, the cowboy responds that "the rascals change sides so often, that you may as well count their faces for nothing," leads him to a barn, and hangs him from a beam, threatening Birch's life if he "offer[s] to touch that dog" (3: 255). The Skinner pleads for mercy and forgiveness from Birch, but Birch chooses to happily watch him suffer as punishment for burning down his own home and stealing the only possessions he had. Although the British characters should realistically be more of a threat to American society, even they

appear more humane and acceptable than the Skinners. The British cowboy has a relatively easy time ridding the country of the miscreant, but, as Cooper himself witnessed, eliminating America of rogues intent on climbing the social ladder would not be such an easy task.

In both *The Linwoods* and *The Spy*, the Skinners are constantly threatening the wealthier families of America by invading, and even destroying, the domestic sphere (the home). Because so many people were focused on the American Revolution, whether it was actually fighting the war or taking care of the home while men were away, distraction presented opportunity for those without an honest cause. During the Revolutionary period, Skinners took advantage of the war to increase their financial gain; during the 1820s and 30s, social-climbing figures who resembled Skinners in the eyes of Cooper and his ilk represented a social threat to America. With so many authors using this setup, the very clear message they send through the use of Skinners and Cowboys is that the wealthier classes are being threatened by the rise of the working class. If class divisions are dwindling, then wealthier families will be forced to mingle and interact with the lower classes, certainly not a pleasant idea for those growing up in an aristocratic home used to servants and very clear class divisions.

### **Skinners and *The Spy***

*The Spy* takes place in 1780 in the “neutral ground” of New York. The novel revolves around the Wharton family, which consists of the father, Mr. Wharton; two daughters, Frances and Sarah; their aunt, Miss Jeanette Peyton, who has cared for the girls since their mother died; and their brother, Henry, a captain for the British army.

George Washington, disguised as Mr. Harper, seeks refuge at the Whartons' home at the same time Henry is visiting. Washington sees through Henry's disguise and promises not to betray him, but urges him to make his visit short to avoid capture. Harvey Birch, a neighbor of the Whartons, moves throughout the neutral ground as a spy for the rebels in the disguise of a peddler. Ignoring Harper's advice, Henry stays one night too long and is captured by Captain John Lawton of the Virginia Dragoons which is commanded by Major Peyton Dunwoodie, who has a romantic history with Frances. Conflicts ensue as Dunwoodie is torn between his love for Frances and his duty as Major, Harvey Birch is constantly pursued by Lawton and the renegade Skinners, and Frances never gives up on trying to reach Washington to pardon her captured brother. By the end of the novel, we find out that Harper, who is Washington, has been working with Harvey Birch, Henry is saved, Frances and Dunwoodie live "happily ever after," and, in a flash forward to the War of 1812, Harvey Birch sacrifices himself for his country.

Previous scholars, such as James L. Shepherd, III and George E. Hastings, have focused on Cooper's influence on other romance writers, events and writers who have influenced (positively or negatively) Cooper's writing of *The Spy*, or on some aspect of the female characters in his novels. Others, like Robert E. Cray Jr. and Andy Trees, have focused primarily on perception and identity, or the use of historical characters in *The Spy*. However, many of these critics have ignored the presence and importance of the Skinners in *The Spy* and the implications these characters have with respect to class tensions, particularly what their inclusion in the novel reveals about Cooper's opinions on social climbing and aristocratic ancestry. Although T. Hugh Crawford addresses the ways in which "Cooper produces an image of George Washington, patriarchy and gender that

exemplifies (and begins to define) post-revolution anxieties regarding authority and control” that are expressed in the novel, he does not include a discussion of the Skinners as a tension-inducing group (61). Likewise, A. Robert Lee puts emphasis on Cooper’s conflict of writing an “American” literature while also incorporating his fervent opinions on maintaining an aristocracy: “despite his lifelong republicanism, Cooper never ceased to be a true-believer in a hierarchy of natural worth for which ‘Old England,’ and, relatedly, upper-class, Anglo-Dutch, ‘Old New York,’ . . . had long supplied the working social and cultural models” (33). Incorporating the Skinners into his novel was one way of encouraging his readers to agree with his beliefs on a rigid social hierarchy.

Despite the fact that Cooper’s messages can frequently be overlooked or completely missed by casual readers, social status plays an important role in most of Cooper’s novels, and *The Spy* is no different. In addition to the main focus on higher-class characters and Cooper’s constant reminder of aristocracy and breeding, he also incorporates Skinner characters as a way of presenting class issues. The Skinners make frequent appearances in *The Spy* and often are the root of major plot changes throughout the novel, causing characters to come together, serving as examples of how America should avoid acting, and functioning particularly as an argument against the changing perspectives on class. Because of Cooper’s initial descriptions of the Skinners, readers immediately associate fear and danger with the name, and the group always confirms that association with its actions. The Wharton sisters – clearly upper-class characters because of their home, possessions, and the presence of slave characters – set their sights on men who are respected and have positions in the armies, and Cooper delights in reminding us frequently of the soldiers’ reputations. Most of the working-class characters lack the



intelligence and common sense of the other characters, Harvey Birch being the one exception, and are often only present in the plot to serve as comic relief (because it is always good to have characters of unfortunate breeding to laugh at). While Birch may represent the working class, his presence suggests Cooper's ideas about the relationship between patriotism and class; Cooper does not condemn Birch because of his status and focuses on his redeeming quality of loyalty to his country.

In "Harvey Birch as the Wandering Jew: Literary Calvinism in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy*," Armand confirms that Harvey Birch, the spy, is also a working-class character, but that "Harvey Birch's covert American heroism raises him, as we shall see, to a stature nearly equal that of the great public patriot [Washington] who imposes this fearful penance upon him" (350). Birch is praised and uplifted as a great American hero when he dies on the battlefield, sacrificing himself in the final chapter which takes place during the War of 1812. In an early chapter of *The Spy*, Birch loses his home, his father, and all the money he has saved when a band of Skinners burn down his home. Cooper's first description of the Skinners includes a hint of distaste for the group, pointing out exactly how the Skinners were perceived in America, especially when he describes the leader of the rogues: "This man was a well-known leader of one of those gangs of maulauders who infested the county with a semblance of patriotism, and were guilty of every grade of offence, from simple theft up to murder" (1: 278). Birch and the Skinners may share a similar social standing, but there is one thing that drastically separates Birch from these men. Despite the many unfortunate events that Birch endures as a secret spy, his patriotism never waivers; in fact, it only seems to grow stronger as the story progresses. Nevertheless, questions arise when we consider that Birch is only perhaps a

few ladders higher than the Skinners on the social ladder, or as Donald G. Darnell describes him, “the antithesis of a gentleman” (26). If Cooper is trying to make very clear messages about class, why is Birch a much more acceptable and heroic character than others who are on his social rung? Can class be excused if one’s patriotism is strong enough?

What may be saving Birch from Cooper’s critique of the working class could arise from the scene when Birch visits Washington in his “office.” Washington offers Birch a bagful of money, which Birch quickly and promptly refuses, admitting that he has no need for money when his beloved country could benefit so much more from it than he. Cooper does not allow Birch to accept the money because he wants to create a clear separation between the heroic Birch and the ladder-climbing Skinners; Birch willingly accepts his poverty as the price for patriotism. Despite Birch’s unwavering patriotism and willingness to constantly help Frances save her brother, he cannot be the hero of the novel solely based on his social standing. Bruce A. Rosenberg asserts that “Birch is certainly not a conventional nor an acceptable hero; the genuine hero (in the moral and aesthetic lights of 1821) is Dunwoodie, and he only because he marries one of the heroines.” Throughout the novel, particularly when we are first introduced to Birch and are told how he conducts his business, it seems that Birch does have a love for money and valuables, especially when we find out that he goes so far as to hide his valuables in secret places in his house. Cooper even writes “[t]he war did not interfere with the traffic of the pedlar, who seized on the golden opportunity which the interruption to the regular trade afforded, and appeared absorbed in the one grand object of amassing money” (1: 58). Birch, like the Skinners, takes advantage of the wartime atmosphere to increase the

number of items in his pack. Nevertheless, Birch's final monetary test comes from Washington's offer; making the correct decision, refusing the money and thus refusing to gain status financially, Birch is able to receive the glory and praise that he finally deserves at the end of the novel. By crafting Birch in a way that differed from the greedy and selfish Skinners, Cooper avoids having his readers feel threatened by the possibility of Birch's desire to climb the social ladder.

When discussing Cooper's Skinners and soldier characters, Diamant claims that "[h]is imaginary British and American officers were always patrician gentlemen" (53). Diamant's realization is completely correct – Cooper *constantly* reminds his readers exactly where the American officers hail from, describing them as 'the Virginians.' Captain Lawton's name is often interchangeable with 'the angry Virginian' (and this is done so often that readers are easily able to recall who 'the angry Virginian' is without Cooper actually providing a name). There are very clear distinctions between the descriptions of the soldiers and the Skinners; Cooper introduces the leader of the Skinners in the following description, highlighting his working-class appearance: "a man still young in years, but his lineaments bespoke a mind long agitated by evil passions. His dress was of the meanest materials and so ragged and unseemly, as to give him the appearance of studied poverty. . . . There was a restlessness in his movements, and agitation in his manner, that proceeded from the workings of the foul spirit within him, and which was not less offensive to others than distressing to himself" (1: 277-8). The leader returns after stealing all of Birch's valuables and, basically, killing his father from worry and shock. In this instance, we see the Skinner attempting to bargain, and again showing his untrustworthiness for material gain when he takes money for a "bribe" but

then destroys the furniture, takes Birch hostage, and ultimately sets the house on fire in front of the man who has just bought it.

To Cooper and the characters in his novel, the Skinners occupy a social and moral status even lower than Indians. In the archaic language of Lawton (which further implies Cooper's commitment to a feudal vision of class), the Skinners are "[m]en, who under the guise of patriotism, prowl through the community, with a thirst for plunder that is unsatiable, and a love of cruelty that mocks the Indian ferocity: fellows, whose mouths are filled with liberty and equality, and whose hearts are overflowing with cupidity and gall – gentlemen that are yclep'd the skinners" (3: 23). False patriotism is almost, if not more, shameful than being born on the lower rungs of the social ladder. Cooper writes within the novel that "a man without honour is worse than a brute" (2: 140). The Skinners refuse to play by the rules; therefore, these brutes must be punished. Lawton, when the Skinners arrive to deliver Birch, explains that he will now punish them for going beyond what he asked and whips them as though they're undisciplined animals by giving "them each the Law of Moses – forty, save one," which the soldiers are more than happy to carry out (2: 145). In true Virginian fashion, "the Skinners were stripped and fastened, by the halters of the party, to as many of the apple-trees as was necessary to furnish one to each of the gang" (2: 145-6). The Skinners, because of their disobedience, and especially because of their social status, must be disciplined. It is not enough that they are segregated from normal society; they also must be shamed and physically ridiculed by upper-class citizens. This particular scene, by using Biblical language, compares the Skinners to the Israelites, being punished the same way that slaves would be disciplined. This is also another example of Cooper encouraging the lower class to stay in their social

position. The Skinners disobey Lawton's orders and go beyond what he asked them to do; Cooper writes this scene as an example to Americans who may be tempted to climb the social ladder – punishment is the result of one trying to rise above his position.

Even the innocent Whartons are not exempt from the terror of the Skinners or Cooper's critique of class. To convince his readers of the threat Skinners pose to social hierarchy, Cooper only adds to the reader's disdain for these characters by demonstrating that the Skinners were willing to destroy the homes and steal the valuables of anyone who existed, not just those, like Lawton, who offended them. Cooper gives the Skinners a rather large amount of power in *The Spy*, but he also uses Lawton to foreshadow how Americans, during Cooper's time, will begin thinking about these wretches: "The time must arrive when America will learn to distinguish between a patriot and a robber" (2: 306). The presence of the Skinners also confirms Cooper's reasons for writing such a novel – politics and choosing sides are not important; rather, "what matters is the achievement of a hierarchical society" (Pudaloff). Such a statement also reverts back to the difference between how Cooper treats the Skinners and Harvey Birch. Birch is allowed to traverse different social groups because of his unwavering patriotism and love for his country, including the "father" of the country. The Skinners are not allowed to venture beyond their social standing because they have no loyalty to their country and fellow citizens.

Washington, in the form of Harper, is even brought down to a working-class level as he travels through the woods and requests shelter and food from random homes he passes along his way. Although Harper/Washington is not traveling or acting the way an aristocratic member of society should, it also appears that he does not quite fit in with the

other poor whites in the novel. Harper's description contains a regal air, but because strangers are looked at with suspicion, it is difficult to define identity because the markers that visually represent social standing must be eliminated with his disguise. Cooper had a major problem with how members of the lower class could now make themselves appear genteel, even though they were not born into high social positions. As Cooper points out through the Skinners, stealing was an easy, though dishonest, way of appearing on a higher rung of the social ladder than one actually was. The Skinners are even aware of this; the leader remarks "we can't go amiss here; there is plate and money enough to make you all gentlemen; yes, and revenge too" (2: 262). The Skinners are despicable men who believe that status and wealth will come from stealing and benefitting from the labor of others. Cooper's goal is to show the chaos and threat the Skinners, representing the working class, bring to America and the elite.

### **Other Aspects of Class in *The Spy***

The Skinners are not the only ones who present Cooper's opinion on social status – Southern heritage and reputation also play a major role throughout *The Spy*. Captain Lawton makes sure to evince his Southern heritage to remind everyone that not only is he an American soldier, but he also has the reputation and good breeding to make him a notable figure. Whenever Lawton introduces himself to new acquaintances his line is "Captain Lawton, of the Virginian horse" (Cooper 1: 123). Lawton also feels the need to remind everyone of his status whenever he senses that he has been addressed incorrectly – "you forget I am a Virginian, and a gentleman" (1: 124). Southern aristocracy finds its way into novels other than just Cooper's. Just as the First Families of Virginia was a title

for Southerners to brag about in the latter half of the 1800s, Southerners in Cooper's novel value and flaunt their heritage. At no point are the Southern soldiers referred to simply as "soldiers," but rather "the Virginians." Cooper makes note that these soldiers are welcome at all houses, an image that is not often reflected when British soldiers show up at homes. Cooper writes "[t]he uniform of his corps was always a passport to the proudest tables; and this, though somewhat tarnished by faithful service and unceremonious usage, was properly brushed and decked out for the occasion" (2: 27). Cooper explains that Lawton's "boots shone with more than holiday splendour, and his spurs glittered in the rays of the sun," while Sedgwick depicts the American soldiers starving and in tattered uniforms (2: 27). Cooper clearly differentiates between those of an aristocratic background and those who have been denied such ancestry.

Cooper gives frequent praise to the Southern officers when he first introduces them against the British side: "Opposed to them were the hardiest spirits of America. Most of the cavalry regiments of the continental army were led and officered by gentlemen from the south. The high and haughty courage of the commanders had communicated itself to the privates, who were men selected with care and attention to the service they were intended to perform" (1: 167-8). The British soldiers were not people to look up to. While reputable soldiers, such as Major Dunwoodie, serve as American role models, the British soldiers are almost as repugnant as the Skinners (just not as low on the social ladder). Birch, doing yet another good deed for his country by saving innocent young American women from making disastrous decisions, interrupts the wedding between Colonel Wellmere and Sarah Wharton to reveal that Wellmere has a wife waiting in Britain that he has refused to acknowledge. None of the American soldiers

cause as much disgust in readers as Wellmere does in this instance, and because Cooper permits readers to think of the Americans as such well-bred citizens, the British characters seem to represent a lower class than the Americans. Even though the British are not reputable characters, they still deserve more respect than the Skinners because they abide by a code of behavior – Cooper’s depiction of the American Revolution may be more of a class war than a political one.

Katy Haynes, Birch’s vulgar, uncouth, working-class housekeeper, also constantly receives Cooper’s ridicule throughout the novel. The only attention Katy receives in scholarship on *The Spy* is by Darrel Abel, who briefly argues that Katy, Caesar, and Dr. Sitgreaves “exemplify the conception of comedy which Cooper was to follow consistently – that only two classes were properly subject to humorous treatment: persons of inferior social status, especially if they belonged to a despised minority, such as negroes or the Irish; and members of learned professions” (355). Unmarried at thirty-five, Katy becomes the housekeeper for the Birches, which is only Harvey and his father. In the first description of Katy, Cooper writes “[o]n the one hand, she was neat, industrious, honest, and a good manager. — On the other, she was talkative, selfish, superstitious, and inquisitive” (1: 56). Her curiosity causes her to spy on Birch when she notices that he constantly sneaks away to the fireplace; doing her own spy work, she finds that he hides his valuables under a floor stone, and from that moment, she is intent on making him her husband. Cooper makes Katy the subject of ridicule because she, like the Skinners, is trying to ascend the social ladder; Birch may be a mere peddler, but he has more than Katy. Katy is hysterical at numerous moments, but never as much as when the Skinners enter Birch’s home and steal all his valuables. Katy is obsessed with money and social



status, constantly remarking on how she will now never marry Birch (that thought never seems to even cross his mind) because he has lost all his possessions and is basically worthless in society, a conversation that the annoyed Miss Peyton claims “I seldom trouble myself with” (1: 298). Even the other characters in the novel laugh at Katy’s absurd comments and encourage her to make a verbal fool of herself just so they have comic entertainment. Katy is so uneducated, or “far from an expert scholar” that she is completely oblivious that she is the (negative) center of attention (1: 271). To show Katy’s low status, Cooper has her carry out many duties with the Whartons’ slave, Caesar, who feels that they are on such equal terms that he frequently warns her against acting certain ways or saying certain things.

Cooper also makes an interesting comparison between the Skinners and African Americans. Early in the novel, Cooper refers to “that vagrant class which has sprung up within the last thirty years, and whose members roam through the country, unfettered by principles, or uninfluenced by attachments” (1: 73-4). Although he is directly speaking about free blacks, his comment can also represent his attitude toward the groups of poor whites who have also sprung up and are trying to immerse themselves into higher-class positions. Caesar tries to claim a higher social status than that of a possession – although most of the characters in the book think of Caesar as Caesar Wharton (the last name of his owners), Caesar calls himself Caesar Thompson, adamantly denying the idea that he is a possession. Having a last name provides identity, and identity, for a black, would put him in a social position higher than that of a slave or servant. Nevertheless, Cooper still tries to make his black characters and Skinners interchangeable – one is not better than the other in his eyes. Caesar frequently changes clothes with other characters (a point

about identity that will be discussed in a later chapter). In chapter ten, Caesar changes clothes with a Skinner. Birch “and Caesar were stripped of their decent garments, and made to exchange clothes with two of the filthiest of the band,” thus showing that there is no distinction, in terms of class, between a black and a poor white (1: 278).

The Whartons also play an important role in *The Spy* because of the message Cooper sends through his depiction of the lifestyle of this upper-class family. In chapter thirteen, Cooper recounts an elaborate, and very detailed, dinner that the Whartons host right after the destruction of Birch’s home and death of his father. All the Virginian soldiers are invited to attend; Colonel Wellmere, a captive of the Virginians, is also included because of his status as a gentleman, clearly indicating that “gentility knows no national boundaries and that a gentleman is welcome anywhere no matter what his politics are” (Darnell 26). Cooper lists the entire menu and emphasizes the attire of the Wharton sisters, not failing to mention the satin, silk, and lace of the dresses. The scene feels more like it belongs in a Jane Austen novel than in the middle of the neutral ground during the Revolution, an unsurprising detail since Cooper’s first novel was a response to a “very trashy” novel he received from England, likely one of Austen’s (Hastings 20-2). After dinner, Colonel Wellmere leaves the men and spends his time “relating the events of fashionable life in the metropolis” to the ladies (2: 54). Cooper also incorporates a nostalgic longing for a previous lifestyle in his description of the Whartons leaving their home, The Locusts, after it has been destroyed by the Skinners. Cooper takes a simple item, a carriage, to lament a way of life that is rapidly fading in the current American landscape:

every vehicle, that in the least aspired to the dignity of patrician notice, was the manufacture of a London mechanic. When Mr. Wharton left the city, he was one of the very few that maintained the state of a carriage. . . . This vehicle stood undisturbed where it had been placed on its arrival; and the ages of the horses had alone protected the favourites of Caesar from sequestration, by the contending forces in their neighbourhood. . . . It was a cumbrous vehicle, whose faded linings and tarnished hammercloth, together with its panels of changing colour, denoted the want of that art which had once given it lustre and beauty. The “lion couchant” of the Wharton arms was reposing on the reviving splendor of a blazonry that told the armorial bearings of a prince of the church, and the mitre that already began to shine through its American mask, was a symbol of the rank of its original owner. (Cooper 2: 295-6).

This carriage is Cooper’s nostalgic image for the remembrance of the upper-class leisure that was rampant during the Revolution, but that is quickly fading during Cooper’s time. In addition to such imagery, Cooper spends an extensive amount of time with description in the novel in order to explain each character’s social standing. Darnell notes that “[t]o a work whose author the reviewer for the *North American Review* said ‘laid the foundations of American romance,’ Cooper brought character types without change from his novel of manners – ladies, gentlemen, officers” (23). Indeed, Cooper’s lengthy and detailed descriptions of dinners, carriages, and persons’ background, dress, and manners (particularly those who could claim the titles of ladies and gentlemen) emphasizes his beliefs in maintaining strict class distinctions.

Cooper's critique of class differs dramatically from Sedgwick's more didactic point of view. Rather than drawing clear lines of social hierarchy, Sedgwick is more inclusive and encourages the blurring of social status in order to inspire national union and expel outdated European ideals of hierarchy.

### **The Skinners and the Abuse of Women and Children**

Sedgwick's *The Linwoods* follows three families, the Loyalist Linwoods, the working-class Eliots, and the Merediths, who cling strongly and proudly to their aristocratic, British background, prior to and during the American Revolution. Conflicts arise from Herbert Linwood's decision to join the rebel army (a decision for which his father disowns him) and his disobedience to George Washington for sneaking into New York to see his family, which causes him to be captured by the British. The remainder of the novel is dedicated to Isabella Linwood's and Bessie Lee's romantic interests; Isabella is unofficially engaged to Jasper Meredith, while Jasper almost destroys Bessie by leading her on. Like most domestic novels, the heroes and heroines end up happy and married (Herbert to Lady Anne Seton, who was intended as a temptation for Jasper; Isabella to the great American hero, Eliot Lee; and Jasper is punished with a marriage to the greedy, conniving Helen Ruthven).

In the 1830s and 1840s, Catharine Maria Sedgwick's novels became increasingly didactic. In fact, Robbins, who analyzes this didacticism in two of Sedgwick's novels, *Live and Let Live* (1837) and *The Boy of Mount Rhigi* (1848), claims that "Sedgwick's publications aimed at inspiring Christian virtue and nurturing ideals of citizenship through literature" (3). Years after the publication of Cooper's *The Spy*, Sedgwick also

incorporates the Skinners into the American Revolution plot as support for the didactic messages about class in her novel. Although, as in *The Spy*, the Skinners in *The Linwoods* represent a threat to society, Sedgwick takes a different approach from Cooper and includes the Skinners as a reminder of what people might resort to if antiquated ideas about class and rigid hierarchies continue in America. If Americans do not change and encourage education and class maneuvering, the working class will have no other option than to survive by alternative means, one of those means being stealing and pillaging, which is the means the Skinners use. VanDette notes that in *The Linwoods*, Sedgwick “sought to bring together the republican values of virtue, selflessness, and patriotism, and the democratic principles of equality, opportunity, and independence” (“Family” 51). Sedgwick’s Skinners represent none of these characteristics; therefore, they also represent a threat to society because they lack the traits of a good American that Sedgwick wishes to instill in her readers. VanDette points out that “[t]he perceived lack of democratic, American literary traditions and the corresponding erosion of republican values concerned many during the era of Jacksonian democracy” (“Family” 59). Sedgwick presents many of those concerns in *The Linwoods* and offers suggestions, from the safe historical distance of the American Revolutionary period, for accepting the new ideas that Jackson brought to the country. In addressing the concern over class, Sedgwick argues that if the upper class continues to try and keep the working class contained within its position, the result could devastate the country (in the form of something akin to Skinners). She also shows how a lack of patriotism (since the Skinners refuse to fight for either the Americans or British) can also negatively affect the present and future of the young country.

The first interaction we have with the Skinners in *The Linwoods* happens well into the novel during a journey back to the rebel camp by Eliot Lee and his nit-wit sidekick Kisel. Carrying dispatches back to Washington, the two men are suddenly approached, in the dark, by a band of Skinners who feign friendliness at first. Just when we think the Skinners will leave the two men alone, the leader suggests they trade horses and boots. The “captain’s” right-hand man “seized Kisel’s bridle and ordered him to dismount. At the same instant, his comrade-captain made a lunge at Eliot, as if for a corresponding seizure; but Eliot perceived the movement in time to evade it” (154). Sedgwick uses this first interaction with the Skinners to foreshadow the destruction they will later bring to innocent bystanders and demonstrates the fear that many people would have had traveling through the country, particularly the neutral areas that were left unguarded by either army. The Skinners do not choose their victim based on class and present a threat to both the Americans and the British; thus, social class was no issue as long as there was some type of valuable to be gained from the victims. Eliot and Kisel arrive at a home and request sleeping arrangements; when they arrive and explain their difficulties, the innkeeper, Coit, explains just who they had met, and also foreshadows unfortunate events to come. Coit says “[a]s sure as a gun, you’ve met the skinners and you’re a lucky man to get out of their hands alive. They’ve been harrying up and down the country like so many wolves for the last three weeks, doing mischief wherever ‘twas to be done; - nobody has escaped them but Madam Archer” (155). Even Madam Archer, however, is not beyond the reach of the Skinners. In a letter to her niece, Isabella Linwood, Mrs. Archer writes “[m]y only substantial fear, after all, is of the cowboys and skinners . . . however, a widow and two blind children have little to dread from creatures who are made in the

image of God” (159). Unfortunately, Mrs. Archer is soon to find out how wrong she really is and how far the Skinners are willing to go for financial gain. The Skinners are such monsters that they have no concern or feeling for single women or children, even if the children are disabled. Sedgwick writes disdainfully about the Skinners, who are much more ruthless and cruel than Cooper’s Skinners. Sam Hewson, an infamous Skinner according to Sedgwick, is completely devoid of feeling. Madam Archer, who lives alone with her two blind children out in the country, has sent all her valuables to New York in anticipation that the Skinners will take advantage of the war and try to steal her belongings. Mrs. Archer’s instincts are correct, and she and her children encounter Hewson and his gang during the night. Outraged that a woman has outwitted him, Hewson demands a payment of 200 guineas and threatens to take one of the children hostage if he is not immediately paid. Hewson, too much of a coward to steal a blind child, gives his comrade liquor so that he will willingly take the fainted Lizzy hostage.

Sedgwick’s Skinners get even more repugnant as the novel progresses as a way to show how unpatriotic citizens can devastate and threaten the nation. Not only do Hewson and his gang threaten Mrs. Archer and kidnap her blind child, but Hewson additionally uses the lifeless girl as a shield against the soldiers, one being the great Eliot Lee, who come to save her. But just like Cooper’s Skinners, when life is threatened, minds are changed about whose side the Skinners support. Hewson receives a bullet in his spine, and as he dies, he tries to bargain with the soldiers, uses class to appeal to his audience, and establishes a separation between himself and his enemies: “Oh, gentlemen . . . take pity on me; my life is going – I’ll give you heaps of gold” (Sedgwick 176). The minute Hewson dies, the general again points out the difference between those of “class” and

those who lack enough humanity to be considered a human being. According to the general, a Skinner “can expect nothing better than to die like a dog” (176). Hewson’s death might be an extreme punishment, but Sedgwick makes it quite evident that, class distinctions aside, there is no place in the country for those who lack patriotism and selflessness.

Sedgwick additionally notes the lowliness of the Skinners during Kisel’s execution (who has been mistaken for a Skinner because he does not have the mental capacity to understand his situation). This scene sets up a stark contrast between the Skinners and members of the military, thus emphasizing Sedgwick’s patriotism for her country: “The usual place for military executions was in an apple orchard, where East Broadway now runs: but the condemned having to suffer as one of the infamous band of skinners, was not thought worthy to swing on a gallows devoted to military men” (279). While Sedgwick may be punishing the existence of criminals from a previous era, she is also showing citizens that focusing too much on material gain can lead a person down the wrong path, and if that path is chosen, what the ultimate consequences will be. Before Eliot and the group of soldiers he recruits in the inn go to save Mrs. Archer and her children from the Skinners, a general berates his men for being cowards. Cowardice is a trait that is even more loathsome than being classified as a Skinner: “Don’t gen’ral me! – don’t defile my name with your lips! A pretty fellow you, to prate of duty and orders in the very face of the orders of the Almighty commander-in-chief, to remember the widows and the fatherless in their affliction. . . . I’d rather fight single-handed with fifty skinners, than have one such cowardly devil as you by at my side” (170). What causes the Skinners to be categorized as such lowly beings is their willingness not only to attack men, but to



take advantage of defenseless women and children. The general's disgust with his soldier is that he's unwilling to defend the citizens of the country he's fighting for – a direct connection between himself and the Skinners. The link between Skinners and cowardice reflects Cooper's opinion in his own novel. Maria Karafilis frequently points out that one of Sedgwick's many goals in writing was to remind her readers of patriotism and pride in their country; a lack of commitment and dedication to the young nation is an unacceptable characteristic for Americans and places them in an even lower social position than the Skinners.

### **Beyond the Skinners: Eliot Lee and Jasper Meredith**

Catharine Maria Sedgwick grew up in a powerful family. Although she aligned with her father's Federalist beliefs when she was young, she later "came to find her father's Federalist views detrimental to American democracy," an obvious opinion that shows through in *The Linwoods* (xx). In fact, Sedgwick loved growing up in Stockbridge, Massachusetts because "one is brought into close social relations with all conditions of people. There are no barriers between you and your neighbors. The highest and lowest meet in their joys and sorrows, at weddings and funerals, in sicknesses and distresses of all sorts" (qtd. in Karafilis xx). Unlike Cooper's novel, Sedgwick's goal is to show how fragile America can be when class and social status are the focus; though Sedgwick and Cooper write nearly identical portraits of Skinners, the context surrounding Sedgwick's Skinner characters reveals Sedgwick's beliefs that rising in social class is a merit and a positive aspect of America. While her father and brothers were notorious political figures, Sedgwick had to find other means of voicing her opinion; thus, she turned to writing.

With her characters and plots, Sedgwick tried “to shape a republican citizenry that, in her eyes, would be capable of fulfilling the American promise of democracy and building a nation in which merit and manners, instead of wealth, determined one’s position” (xxiv). Robbins claims that Sedgwick “blended genres, adapting them to meet didactic purposes shaped by her strong sense of belonging to a social class with major educative responsibilities” (3). Sedgwick felt it was her responsibility to use her education and social standing to help those who were not born into positions that offered opportunities for advancement.

There are three major levels of social distinction in *The Linwoods*. At the top of the social ladder is Jasper Meredith. Sedgwick writes that “Meredith had been bred in a luxurious establishment, and was taught to regard its artificial and elaborate arrangement as essential to the production of a gentleman. He was a citizen ‘of no mean city,’ though we now look back upon New-York at that period . . . as little more than a village” (24). The two American families, the Linwoods and the Lees, are representations of humbler families. Living in the middle of New York, the Linwoods embody a middle-class family divided by political leanings. The Lees, on the other hand, live out in the country, and though they serve as the lower class, “country bumpkin” citizens, Eliot ends up being the epitome of the American role model. Sedgwick highlights the differences between classes in her description of the three boys from each family (Jasper, Herbert Linwood, and Eliot) as Jasper and Eliot venture off to college, while Herbert is kept at home because his father is worried about his rebel leanings:

There was then, resulting from the condition of America, far more disparity between the facilities and refinements of town and country than

there now is; and even now there are young citizens (and some citizens in certain illusions remain young all their lives) who look with the most self-complacent disdain on country breeding. Prior to our revolution, the distinctions of rank in the colonies were in accordance with the institutions of the old world. The coaches of the gentry were emblazoned with their family arms, and their plate with the family crest. (24)

Jasper considers himself superior to most of the characters in the novel, and Eliot is no exception (Jasper even toys with Eliot's sister, just for fun). Jasper "was himself of the privileged order and, connected with many a noble family in the mother country, he felt his aristocratic blood tingle in every vein" (25). Jasper is an unlikeable character from the beginning when he asks Eliot to take care of his debts (which he has accumulated in the form of fines for accompanying women to balls in Boston) and gets even more disgusting when he causes Bessie Eliot's breakdown and laughs at the results. Jasper is Sedgwick's example of what could happen to the country and its citizens if people are too concerned with their genteel reputation and finances. Jasper is connected to the old European ideas of wealth, an outdated and dangerous mindset for the new republic to possess.

The great American hero of Eliot Lee does not grow up in a wealthy family and is the complete opposite of Jasper in attitude and situation. Pitted against the wealthy Herbert and British Jasper, Eliot is the American ideal – the perfect role model for young American boys (and lower-class citizens) to look up to and strive to be, not only for Eliot's patriotic loyalty, but also in terms of his refusal to focus on monetary gain. Sedgwick claims that the backgrounds of Eliot and Jasper were "widely different. Eliot Lee's parentage would not be deemed illustrious, according to any artificial code; but

graduated by nature's aristocracy . . . he should rank with the noble of every land" (25).

Sedgwick's implication is that through hard work and kindness, anyone can improve their lot in life, even if he has been born into the "lowest" class.

Eliot is the most likable character in the novel and easily converses and gets along with everyone, even the British officers. As he and Kisel are resting from their encounter with the Skinners, Eliot shares conversation with the inn-keeper that sounds like Sedgwick's personal opinion on class and the future of the country coming through the story:

The time is coming, captain, and that's what the country is fighting for; for we can't say we are desperately worried with the English yoke; but the time is coming when one man that's no better than his neighbour won't wear stars on his coat, and another that's no worse a collar round his neck; when one won't be born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and another with a pewter spoon, but all will start fair, and the race will be to the best fellow. (157)

Although this message is being presented in a Revolutionary setting, Sedgwick is putting it out there for her own generation to think about. Sedgwick believed in teaching through writing; therefore, much of *The Linwoods* can be looked at as a didactic text meant to inform and teach the public, not only about the past and reestablish patriotism for future generations of Americans, but also about major problems that needed to be addressed in the present. Sedgwick, according to Robbins, believed that "[o]nce the more privileged members of her audience felt adequate sympathy for the lower classes, Sedgwick expected those readers to become eager participants in efforts to transform the

unfortunate . . . into productive Americans” (7). As Sedgwick teaches readers through her novel, she also takes the opportunity to openly state how important education is to America’s citizens. Sedgwick, in her didactic way, promotes education in her description of Eliot: “[c]ircumstances combined to produce the happiest results – to develop his physical, intellectual, and moral powers; in short, to make him a favourable specimen of the highest order of New-England character” (26). Although Sedgwick encourages elimination of class differences, this statement clearly claims that education makes a person more valuable to society, and the phrase “highest order” has obvious connections to social standing.

Like most female writers during the 1830s, Sedgwick ends her novel with several marriages. Sedgwick includes these marriages in order to incorporate social commentary on the way women approach marriage and as another didactic technique for her female readers. Isabella Linwood and Lady Anne Seton ignore the rules of class and follow their hearts, both marrying what would be considered, at least to an author like Cooper, beneath their own social status. Not all of the marriages have happy endings, however. Through the marriage between Helen Ruthven and Jasper Meredith, Sedgwick shows that by focusing on wealth, like the British, two people can find themselves in an unhealthy and miserable marriage. The characters in *The Linwoods* who are despicable, such as Meredith’s mother, are constantly obsessed with social standing. Mrs. Meredith, because she knows that Lady Anne has an extremely large inheritance, brings Anne over to America in order to influence her son to marry her rather than Isabella. Sedgwick’s message is to encourage her readers to avoid acting like the British characters because focusing too much on social status and wealth could ultimately be the downfall of the

young country. Even William Cullen Bryant realized that Sedgwick's novels were didactic: "all of them designed to illustrate some lesson in human life, to enforce some duty, or warn from some error of conduct, and all most happily adapted to this purpose" (qtd. in Robbins 6). Sedgwick incorporates numerous social messages into *The Linwoods* for her American readers, and she strongly encourages her readers to follow Jackson's ideals and eliminate the old, European ideas of class differentiation.

### **The Clash of Class**

Despite the idea of Jacksonian democracy and the goal to abolish wide class divisions, it is clear in both novels that class creates a barrier between many of the characters. Although Harvey Birch frequently visits the Wharton home, he is treated only like a salesman; Birch never sits down to dinner with the Whartons, as the rebel officers do, and Birch is never treated with the respect that higher-class characters receive from other characters. Additionally, the class differences in *The Linwoods* establish clear positions and jobs for many of the characters. Eliot Lee attends the same school as Jasper Meredith, and even lends him money to save him from several debts, but his social status is established throughout the novel as being lesser than that of Jasper, and even the Linwoods. While the Linwoods act as the middle class, they are still above Lee and his family, who live on a rural farm rather than in the city. However, the status of the Linwoods is not enough for Meredith's mother, who is appalled that his son could possibly be in love with such a lower-class woman. She brings her niece over in order to entice Meredith into marrying her so they can inherit her wealth.

There is a clear division in class shown by Sedgwick in *The Linwoods*. The British army, which has its camp in New York, openly mocks the rebel army because of its lack of materials, food, and clothing. As Huston notes about class in general during the American Revolution, the Tories were there for comfort and a quick defeat of the rebels. When Eliot is invited to Sir Henry Clinton's with a message from Washington, he notes the extravagance of the British military lifestyle:

There were no indications on Sir Henry's table of the scarcity and dearness of provisions so bitterly complained of by the royalists who remained in the city. At whatever rate procured, Sir Henry's dinner was sumptuous. Eliot compared it with the coarse and scanty fare of the American officers, and he felt an honest pride in being one among those who contracted for a glorious future, by the sacrifice of all animal and present indulgence. . . . Dish after dish was removed and replaced, and the viands were discussed, and the generous wines poured out, as if to eat and to drink were the chief business and joy of life. (131)

War is rarely mentioned, and in Sir Henry's home, the luxuries afforded make it seem like there is not a war even happening. Eliot is shocked at the difference in lifestyle between the British and the Americans, but his patriotism grows from the fact that his side is suffering for a worthy cause. When Sir Henry asks about the luxuries available to the rebel armies, Eliot replies "with a burst of pardonable pride, 'I'll tell you how we live, sir' – the earnest tone of his voice attracted attention – 'we live on salt beef, brown bread, and beans, when we can get them; and when we cannot, some of us fast, and some share their horses' messes'" (131-2). This particular scene is when Isabella starts to rethink her

political beliefs, but it is also a moment for readers to remember the struggles that went into the country – Americans should not be making enemies with each other over such issues as class divisions, but coming together under a common history.

### **Conclusion**

Cooper and Sedgwick both voiced their concerns over class in their fiction of the American Revolution; however, each author had vastly different opinions on the topic which was largely due to the time period that the author was publishing the work in. Cooper's shock at the change in America resulted in his desperate plea for Americans to remember the aristocratic assumptions held by those who originally founded the nation and to resist the beliefs of Andrew Jackson and his supporters. George Becker confirms that "[t]he essence of government to Cooper lay in so organizing it that the people would have no opportunity to make mistakes but would entrust authority to their betters, who would be incapable of error" (329). For Cooper, giving Americans, *all* Americans, the capability of making major decisions was out of the question and should be left to those of a more genteel, educated status, or those he considered 'better'. Cooper wanted to put a halt to merging of classes and the elimination of boundaries that divided groups of Americans. Cooper's philosophy was that "[w]hat the country needs is an upper class composed of people of judgment and experience who are resolute to support what is good in the United States" (Becker 330). Allowing the uneducated, the working class, and ignorant immigrants to make major decisions for America was a risk that Cooper believed would threaten the well-being of the country.



On the other hand, a few years later Sedgwick was lending a voice to those who may not have had the means to voice their own opinions. Sedgwick wrote, *The Linwoods* in particular, to inspire patriotism within her audience and encourage societal change, such as less strict class divisions. Cooper was aware that his audience was the wealthier, literate Americans who would have wanted to see clear divisions between the rich and the poor. Sedgwick, on the other hand, had a clear goal in mind when she wrote and published *The Linwoods*. Robbins notes that Sedgwick had a very obvious “class-based agenda for social reform,” and this agenda can be seen throughout *The Linwoods* (1). *The Linwoods* has very open and obvious opinions on class and encourages Americans, at numerous times, to envision an America that ignored social standing. Those who did worry about financial issues and material possessions could end up miserable like Helen Ruthven and Jasper Meredith. Britain was the place for those who were self-absorbed and money hungry.

What makes the Skinners such an interesting literary choice is the fact that they steal from wealthier Americans. Considering the fact that Cooper, in particular, used Skinners to express his dissatisfaction with the way social status and class were being eliminated in America, it is interesting that these working-class, good-for-nothing whites are literally stealing valuables from other Americans in the novels. Cooper is exclaiming, loud and clear, that with the dwindling of class divisions, the lower classes are stealing from others, benefitting from the fruits of others’ labor. VanDette points out that *The Linwoods* includes commentary on “the threat of national disunion presented in the Nullification Crisis” (“Family” 60). Sedgwick’s goal in incorporating Skinners into her novel is to show that a lack of patriotism can dramatically threaten the safety and well-

being of the young nation and could possibly lead to disunion if it is not thwarted. Like many women writers of the period, Sedgwick emphasizes that education and manners should be the focus rather than financial gain and familial reputation.

By reading *The Spy* and *The Linwoods*, current readers are able to see the tensions and anxieties that Jacksonian democracy and class immersion created for America during the 1820s and 1830s and how Americans used literature about the American Revolution to voice concern over and work through their issues, or in the case of Sedgwick, encourage other Americans to embrace the changes that were happening and make life better for the underprivileged, rather than creating wider gaps between various social groups. Both Cooper and Sedgwick found success in using the American Revolution as a literary trope to bring awareness to class controversies.

## CHAPTER FOUR

‘If I had been a man, I should not have forgotten that I was an American’: Female Patriots and American Heroines in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Spy*, Lydia Maria Child’s *The Rebels*, Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *The Linwoods*, and George Lippard’s *Blanche of Brandywine*

**Introduction**

Betsy Erkkilä, in “Revolution in the Renaissance,” points out that “[d]uring the 1830s and 1840s, women laborers invoked the rhetoric of revolution to justify strike activity in Lowell textile mills; and in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott rewrote the Declaration of Independence as a Declaration of Sentiments that declared ‘all men and women are created equal’ and asserted women's right to vote” (22-3). Beth A. Salerno notes, however, that the women’s movement did not begin at Seneca Falls, but rather, that meeting “was the end result of a series of political, economic, and social changes in Jacksonian America” (79-80). Consistent with Salerno’s statement, several vital female authors of the nineteenth century had already sunk their teeth into the topic of the American Revolution as a means for asserting female rights and were encouraging women to take part in the political and social debates in the country. Highlighting strong, American women, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Lydia Maria Child, and George Lippard had already preceded the women’s movement by incorporating resilient, opinionated women in their literature. On the other hand, James Fenimore Cooper stayed consistent with the patriarchal trend of keeping women in the domestic sphere and out of politics.

Salerno states that “[t]he women and men attending the Seneca Falls convention, like most people in Jacksonian America, understood that America had a God-given destiny, inherited from the American Revolution. Each individual had a personal responsibility to work toward maintaining and improving that legacy. Yet Americans as a whole disagreed over how exactly to achieve national perfection” (81). Prior to women’s rights events, such as Seneca Falls, many women found their political voice with the rise of antislavery movements and societies. Even if they were excluded from other, male-dominated areas of politics, they established organizations and societies for the causes they found worthy and even met in small groups to discuss and converse on certain topics.

Although the women’s movement was a significant event in history, it excluded those who were not white, as well as working-class women (Salerno 96). That same trend is reflected in the literature of the period – the female characters who trespass into the male sphere of politics almost always come from white, middle- and upper-class families. In *The Spy*, Frances Wharton, who comes from an upper-class, Westchester County family with whom members of the royal army frequently socialize, is Cooper’s representation of the ideal American girl: strong-minded and charming, but also well-bred. Lucretia, who begins Child’s *The Rebels* as an orphan, eventually inherits a massive fortune from British ancestors; it is not until this moment that she feels powerful enough to challenge and overthrow the status quo (and the expectations of her marriage). Rose (a free black from Sedgwick’s *The Linwoods*) is one exception to this rule, although her only participation in politics takes place with slaves and never with other women (Rose will be discussed in much more detail in the following chapter). Blanche, Isidore, Mary,

and Rose from Lippard's *Blanche of Brandywine* all come from middle-class American families or British aristocracy.

Despite the overwhelming presence of women in American Revolution romances, as well as the numerous female authors of such romances, some nineteenth-century readers believed that women were uninterested in the political and public sphere. Catharine Maria Sedgwick's sister-in-law, Susan Ridley Sedgwick, a nineteenth-century children's novelist, stated in 1834 that "it has indeed often been observed by foreigners, with some surprise, that females here are remarkably absent from the care of the public weal; that they either know nothing or care little about subjects connected with it" (qtd. in Samuels 381). The foreigners mentioned, likely travelers such as Alexis de Tocqueville, must have been denied the opportunity of reading historical romances, which frequently revolve around women, marriage, and women's participation in politics. Although Sedgwick, Child, and Lippard voiced their opinions on women's rights, Cooper, writing earlier, tried to play by the rules, and though he did consider women important to a novel and to American life, he made no cutting-edge remarks about women's rights. While his female heroine, Frances Wharton, does display strong qualities and openly voices her rebel opinion, she also succumbs to many of the female stereotypes that are seen in American literature, particularly by male authors. Most of the women in Cooper's novel reflect traditional female stereotypes; the one woman who does not maintain her place is Isabella Singleton, and in one dramatic scene, she is shot by opposing fire and immediately dies.

Sedgwick, Child, and Lippard also simultaneously incorporate the stereotypical weak woman who falls for the wrong man (always British) and allows the man to

completely destroy her life physically, mentally, and emotionally. The authors were contending with the idea of what we now consider the cult of domesticity. Samuels, writing during the surge of scholarship that emerged on women writers in the 1980s, claims “[b]ecause this [domestic] literature often seeks to persuade, instruct, or reform its readers, literary critics have been uncomfortable with giving it the same treatment as ‘serious’ literature” (383). The novels of Sedgwick and Child, especially the two focused on here that deal with the American Revolution, should certainly be taken seriously because they both reveal so much about the period in which they were written and the problems that America was facing. Sedgwick and Child use their novels to demonstrate how active women were in the American Revolution. Additionally, Sedgwick and Child show that options and choices are possibilities when it comes to marriage and that the old European marriage ideals are no longer relevant to American women. Samuels argues that

Although typically the action of these [domestic] novels takes in specific battles, real prisons, and real historical figures such as Washington, the excitement or suspense is provided by obstacles to the marriages of their central characters. This is not just the formal requirement of the novel plot; rather, the achievement of these marriages represents the satisfactory conclusion of the revolutionary contest. Stated simply, the marriages of the characters in these novels typically involve their discovery of self in a political world, a founding of the family which is a founding of the state. Indeed, the work of the family seems to be to create selves who create families who create states in their own image. (387)

Family plays a major role in these novels, thus also showing how important the female part of the family was, and still is. Women were the major components of creating families that reflected and carried out the values of the country.

Most scholars – Shirley Samuels and Ashley Shannon, particularly – focus on the intertwining of marriage and politics, which is a theme recurring from Cooper, to Child, and then mimicked by Sedgwick. Samuels points out that in Cooper’s *The Spy*, “[t]he marriage plot, the most prominent in the novel, presents the familiar scenario of marital choices that are identical to political choices” (65). And as Samuels asserts, the novels that deal with female characters always include marriages that are intertwined with politics. One interesting similarity in all three novels is the pairs of women that occur in each book, one a Loyalist and the other a patriot. In *The Spy*, there are Sarah and Frances Wharton – Sarah sides with the British while Frances is decidedly a rebel (from a negative perspective, the women tend to side with their male counterpart). In Sedgwick’s *The Linwoods*, there are Isabella Linwood (Loyalist turned patriot) and Bessie Lee. Child’s *The Rebels* highlights Lucretia Fitzherbert (also a Loyalist turned patriot) and Grace Osborne. Lippard’s *Blanche of Brandywine* provides two cousins, Blanche and Rose (patriots), although he also includes Lady Isidore (who secretly fights for the Loyalists as a man), the forlorn lover of Percy who is waiting for him in England to return from the Revolution. No matter what the circumstance, the woman who chooses, or is forced, to love a British officer is always doomed – whether her life ends in madness or death. While this pattern is clearly a political statement in terms of the American Revolution, these three authors are also making a cultural statement; rejecting British

husbands resembles the calls of writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson to reject British artistic models in the establishment of a national literature

George Lippard also depicts the British as a threat to American virtue. In his most popular novel, *The Quaker City* (1845), the women spend most of the time avoiding libertines whose only focus is rape. Like *The Quaker City* plot, the women in *Blanche of Brandywine* (1846) also constantly run from men who consider them conquests – and all these men, paralleling the previously mentioned novels of Sedgwick and Child, are British. Reynolds claims that “[a] man with feminist leanings, he [Lippard] supported women's self-organization, believing that woman's lot was as bad as the slave's” (Introduction viii). One message in Lippard’s novel is that American innocence is threatened by outsiders. He also tells American readers that women should not have to constantly defend themselves and worry about the protection of their virtue.

### **Cooper’s *The Spy Sisters***

James Fenimore Cooper provides the standard, conservative, patriarchal portrayal of women that differs from the more progressive depictions that Sedgwick, Child, and Lippard write. In *The Spy*, three female characters receive the most attention – Frances Wharton, her sister Sarah, and Isabella Singleton. Frances, Sarah, and Isabella’s major roles revolve around marriage. After Sarah almost weds an already married British soldier, she becomes completely useless in the plot – the shock of the event is too much for her to handle and she turns (even more) fragile and hysterical. Although Sarah does not play much of a role in the novel from the beginning, she becomes even less of an interesting character after her breakdown, adding nothing to the novel except silly,



childlike remarks in emotional scenes like Isabella's death. Frances, although she often partakes in some political talk, is obsessed with her beau, the American Major Dunwoodie; all of her actions are motivated by securing the safety and love of Dunwoodie and her Tory brother, Henry. Isabella, the sister of an injured rebel soldier, is secretly infatuated with Dunwoodie, but Cooper kills her off when she voices her love for Dunwoodie and desires to actively participate in the Revolution and cast aside her role as a woman.

Cooper is rarely praised by scholars for his representation of women; in fact, John P. McWilliams goes so far as to claim that "Cooper's women . . . remain at the vanishing margin of critical interest" (62). Despite such disinterest to some, other critics find Cooper's representation of women interesting, though troubling. Mary Suzanne Schriber approaches Cooper from the perspective of his interpretation of "the American girl." According to Schriber, "James Fenimore Cooper not only worked extensively with the idea of 'the American girl' but he presented her in many of the terms we currently attribute almost exclusively to [Henry] James," such as the infamous Daisy Miller who can be found in American literature of a later period (237). Schriber additionally points out that "[t]he heroines of the Leatherstocking series, the source of our usual notion of Cooper's women, are conventional fair- and dark-haired types occasionally relieved by a third figure recently noted by critics, the spirited and intelligent heroine," which is "Cooper's version of 'the American girl'" (237). As with the dark-haired and dark-skinned Cora Munro in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, Isabella must be killed because she, too, is a misfit in her company. Isabella cannot be "the American girl" because she is too independent, and the wildness that Cooper points out to readers

indicates her separation from the more acceptable Frances. Schriber argues that Cooper's depiction of "the American girl" is that "[l]ike the New World itself . . . [she] will be simple, fresh, and innocent" (238). Frances is exactly that. She involves herself in political talk, but never contributes anything too complex. She is so innocent that when she finds out that Isabella also loves Dunwoodie, she immediately believes that she has been duped by him, but is willing to sacrifice her own happiness when she witnesses Isabella's outpouring of emotion for him. Cooper believed that the role of a woman was the "regeneration of society through woman's influence" (Schriber 239). Frances has positive impacts on the men and women in her life; even Harper/Washington is touched by Frances.

Though Frances is less rebellious than Child's, Sedgwick's, and Lippard's heroines, Frances has an important role in the novel. Nina Baym notes that it is "an embarrassment to his [Cooper's] critics" that they have long ignored Cooper's women on purpose and that, like Frances, they "are of central social significance" in his works ("The Women" 696, 697). Though she is referring specifically to his more popular *Leatherstocking Tales*, the same can be said of *The Spy*. On the other hand, T. Hugh Crawford argues that "[m]ost critics consider Cooper's women characters flat and uninteresting. In *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, Richard Chase claims 'His [Cooper's] characters, especially his 'females,' as he always calls them, are usually sticks'" (Crawford 23). Frances, for all her negative traits (although these traits seem extremely positive when compared against her weak older sister, Sarah, who is the epitome of a "stick"), may not be as interesting and empowering as the female characters created by Child and Sedgwick, but she does still serve an important role in the novel.

Crawford, who disagrees with Chase, believes that Frances is an important addition to the plot:

While [Frances] may not be physically imposing, fatherly, or plain-spoken, she is a close observer, demonstrates the ability to respond flexibly to unfamiliar terrain and situations, and can win the trust and admiration of those people necessary for her to accomplish what she desires. She uses all of these abilities to take charge in a situation where the entire Wharton family seems to have been abandoned because of its members' respective inability to survive in a rapidly changing society. Members of the lower classes and women cannot assume authority openly, but instead must, where possible, exert control behind the scenes. (71)

Baym argues that “Cooper himself believes that women are of central social significance. His theme is society, and he defines women as the nexus of social interaction. Therefore women have an important place in his works even when they themselves seem like insignificant beings, or are very crudely drawn by the author” (“The Women” 697). The novel revolves around the Wharton women and frequently the Wharton homestead, that is, until it is destroyed by the Skinners; even when battles take place the women are never far, physically or emotionally, from the events.

While Frances participates in a very small action in the novel, that of seeking aid from Harvey Birch, the spy, but stumbling upon the disguised George Washington, she maintains her innocence and fragility throughout the tale. Cooper chooses to keep Frances in the domestic sphere (she ends up marrying Dunwoodie – an action that she has wanted from the very beginning); therefore, Frances is spared from suffering a fate

similar to Isabella's. In a brief comparison between Frances and Sedgwick's Isabella Linwood, Maria Karafilis claims that "Frances is an ineffective political agent" (xviii). T. Hugh Crawford agrees, asserting that "Frances is a hero but also a woman, and as such cannot fit completely into Cooper's or Weems's imaging of revolutionary authority. She can be clear-sighted and actively interventionary, but she cannot be a father to her country. Instead she must act by appealing (in private council) to the patriarchal authority of Washington himself" (70). Throughout *The Spy*, Frances, although she openly voices her rebel opinions, fails to actually do anything about them; the one time she tries to take an active part in the plot is when she and Dunwoodie get married to give her brother ample time to escape his American captors. When she says too much at her brother's trial, indicating a connection between Henry and Birch, the spy, she faints (a very typical reaction for female characters who find themselves in a stressful situation that requires too much emotion).

Isabella Singleton's death is inevitable from the beginning because of the conventions of womanhood that she constantly challenges, actions that probably would not have gone over well, particularly with male readers, during the time of *The Spy's* publication in the 1820s, but which make her more of an interesting female character than many of the others. In fact, Isabella shares similar characteristics with Cora from Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. Isabella, when she is shot by British crossfire and realizes that she will die, voices her distress at not being able to serve her country. Isabella whispers, "my sex and strength have forbidden me the dearest of privileges" (3: 5). Isabella also has her weak moments and allows her emotions to be publicized (one of the traits that ultimately leads to Cooper killing her). Isabella weeps constantly when she

finds out her brother has been injured, although her “sensitive imagination” led her to believe he was in more danger than he really was, and she openly admits to loving Dunwoodie, an action that, as a woman, she should keep private (2: 15). According to James Franklin Beard, “Isabella Singleton, who betrays her code as a woman by confessing her love unsought, must die. (‘I’m damned glad she is dead,’ Cooper wrote on the copy when he revised *The Spy* for Colburn and Bentley’s Standard Novels in 1831.)” (90). When Isabella receives the bullet that was intended for Captain Lawton, she happily holds the bullet wound and consoles Lawton by explaining “I have the consolation of knowing in my dying moments, that what woman could do in such a cause, I have done” (3: 4-5). Isabella continues voicing her opinions and regrets at being a woman, telling Frances that “America and her liberties was my earliest passion, and . . . Dunwoodie was my next and my last” (3: 10-11). Isabella also laments that she is unable to serve her country in the war – another damning trait that foreshadows Isabella’s demise. Isabella attempts to cross the boundary into male territory by wishing that she could rid herself of female domestic duty. In Isabella’s final moments, “[t]he rapid approach of death gave to the countenance of Isabella a look of more than usual wildness, her large and dark eyes being strongly contrasted to the ashy paleness of her cheeks” (3: 6-7). By killing Isabella, Cooper confirms his belief that women are more important in the social sphere than the political.

Cooper’s female representatives differ dramatically as Cooper offers multiple perspectives on women and femininity – Isabella and Sarah represent the two extremes (the types of women who will not be able to survive in America), and Frances, according to Cooper, is the perfect balance between the two. Sarah, because she sides with the

Loyalists, ends up losing her mind. During her wedding ceremony, when Harvey Birch bursts in and reveals that Colonel Wellmere is married to a woman in England, Sarah immediately faints from the shock. Cooper adds, “[t]here is an instinctive delicacy in woman, that for a time seems to conquer all other emotions, however powerful, and, through its impulse, the insensible bride was immediately conveyed from sight by her friends, and the parlour was deserted to the wondering group of men” (2: 256). Cooper falls into the typical male perspective regarding nineteenth-century women – they are only guided by their emotions and, naturally, faint whenever events take a dramatic and unexpected turn. Sarah, especially, serves only as a pretty face – she never has anything of substance to add to conversations and in the words of Cooper, “the fine figure and lovely face of Sarah Wharton” made her “the belle of the city” (1: 37). Physical beauty (or lack thereof) recurs in the novels of Child, Sedgwick, and Lippard; therefore, Cooper alone cannot be criticized for giving preference to beautiful women.

Cooper also encourages his American male readers to be protectors of women. Baym notes that, according to Cooper’s writings, “woman has the right to expect the continual protection of men and to demand unremitting vigilance from them on her behalf” (“The Women” 701). Paralleling Baym’s observation, Cooper inserts an interesting comment near the finale of *The Spy*. As Frances makes her way through the woods, being led by Harper/Washington, Cooper asserts, “[t]he good treatment of their women is the surest evidence that a people can give of their civilization, and there is no nation which has more to boast of in this respect than the Americans” (3: 176). Women are not allowed to be independent beings or to venture too far away from their expected social positions, but a nation is savage if its women are not treated with respect and care.

Cooper's claim is that women are extremely important to a society; they just cannot be left without patriarchal protection. Additionally, Baym notes that "[t]hough Cooper's women have no power over his men, they are vital for man's civilizations, and thus man has to take them along wherever he goes, and at whatever cost" ("The Women" 698). Cooper does not give his female characters as much agency as Child, Sedgwick, and Lippard do, but they still serve an important purpose in his novels and explain to American readers the significance of women to a functioning American society while maintaining the stereotypes of feminine domesticity.

### **Women of *The Rebels***

Lydia Maria Child's Revolutionary novel, *The Rebels* (1825), takes place in Boston in 1765, when tensions between rebels and Loyalists really began to divide the colonies. While it does have a Revolutionary setting, the novel mostly involves the domestic and familial sphere and demonstrates how the Revolution affected the relationships between families and friends. The plot revolves around the Osbornes (the father, his daughter Grace, and son Henry) who have rebel leanings, and their Loyalist friends, including Governor Hutchinson, Lucretia Fitzherbert, Captain Somerville, and Madam Sanford. Grace believes that she and Somerville (a British officer) share romantic feelings, but when Lucretia, an orphan and Grace's less attractive best friend, finds out that she has inherited money from British ancestors, Somerville transfers his affections to her (in line with how other authors have portrayed the British as greedy and self-serving), leaving Grace heartbroken and on her deathbed. Once Lucretia finds out what Somerville has done to Grace (who ends up dying), she publicly scorns and humiliates Somerville at

their (reputed) wedding ceremony. Somerville dies alone and in poverty; Lucretia and Henry Osborne get married as the American Revolution begins.

Lydia Maria Child had broadminded and passionate opinions regarding social reform, most strongly toward women's rights and the abolitionist cause; in fact, she would later edit and distribute Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) (Karcher 416). Child believed that women were as mistreated as slaves; she rejected the idea of all-female societies that worked toward women's rights, believing instead that women and men should work together for equality. One of Child's main goals of *The Rebels* was to convince readers "that the Revolution indeed elevated women from the status of inferiors and pawns to that of respected if not fully equal partners in the society to which they had helped give birth" (Karcher 41). Child is seen as a more progressive advocate for women's and blacks' rights than Catharine Maria Sedgwick, but her Revolutionary novel, despite its strong feminist messages, takes on many of the traditions of the domestic novel in order to appeal to a wider audience, thus ensuring that her message encouraging women to stand up for themselves reached numerous American readers.

Following in the wake of Cooper's popularity, Child's historical romance may have been overshadowed by the male writers of the period. According to Shannon, "[i]n calling attention to her attempt to enter the territory staked out by Scott and Cooper, Child asks her readers to consider her work as equally important to that of the two men whose preeminence in the genre of the national romance was unquestioned" (73). Scott L. Pratt argues that "most of Child's earliest stories were based on themes of cross cultural communication, its occasional success, and its frequent disastrous failure. Her



work during this period differs from much of the literature of the time because it presents a vision of cultural coexistence” (95). In *The Rebels*, the cross-cultural communication between two female characters is the downfall for one American, however. Although Child includes an abundance of historical facts and shows the difficulties of two cultures trying to function cooperatively during such a tumultuous period as the outbreak of the Revolution, her main focus is on women’s roles in society and politics. Child’s innovation upon Cooper and other male novelists is to smuggle a subtext about women’s rights into the already extant genre of the domestic historical novel.

Child believed that women were the key to social reform; interestingly enough, the only female character who has any influence on society is Lucretia. The male characters certainly participate in politics, but Lucretia is the only person to take any type of action. Although Child’s novel ends up with the heroine, Lucretia, marrying the rebel-leaning Henry Osborne, Child gives Lucretia more agency than any of Cooper’s female characters, who rarely question the positions they are, as women, required to stay in. Child does not kill off Lucretia for taking a stand against her British abuser, the route that Cooper likely would have taken, but Lucretia is also not given the opportunity of being without a male companion in the end. Although Child reinforces the idea that marriage is woman’s natural destiny, she at least gives Lucretia the option of choosing who she wants to be with, thus also choosing and establishing her own identity in the community that has been questioning where her loyalties lie. Shannon additionally points out how important Lucretia’s transition from Loyalist to Patriot really is. By rejecting Somerville, Lucretia accepts an American identity, a transition that readers can witness through her letters to Grace where Lucretia, living in London as the “newly discovered American

heiress,” writes about how much she misses America, its landscape, and its lack of attention to wealth and possessions (Child 147).

The most fascinating aspect of *The Rebels* is Lucretia’s transformation. Shannon notes that

Child was aware of the importance to canonical Romanticism of the privileged nature of individual subjectivity; the ability of a given individual, regardless of rank or status in society, to achieve awareness of him- or herself as a unique human being capable of exercising free will within a contractual social system. The preeminence of the self . . . emerges in Child’s historical novels as a means for women to assert citizenship. (75)

*The Rebels* is largely a novel about a woman trying to decide to which country her allegiance belongs. Lucretia, as Shannon argues, is an example of a time when women had the opportunity of standing up for their country, but Lucretia’s character is also a way for Child to address her contemporary readers and encourage her female audience to take strides for women’s rights.

While Lucretia and Grace are best friends, several differences between the two women mark them as contrasting heroines:

Grace especially is the kind of meek, quiet heroine, principled but not strident, who so often represents the ideal woman in sentimental fiction. Ultimately, however, Grace is displaced from heroine status by her sentimental death of a broken heart, and Lucretia, not beautiful, neither

initially nor ultimately wealthy, and extremely transgressive with relation to marriage, emerges as the lone protagonist of the novel. (Shannon 81)

Both women are influenced by their emotions; however, Lucretia uses the anger that Somerville has stirred in her to take action against injustice that has been done to Grace, while Grace pines for unrequited love that she is actually better without. Somerville, as the British villain, pursues Lucretia and “regretted the tie that bound him to her humble friend . . . Grace, in her pale and placid beauty, was forgotten . . . he thought of her only as an obstacle in the way of his prosperity” (Child 239). Somerville often gets angry at Lucretia because she voices her own opinions and desires; one of Grace’s main appeals for Somerville is that she does not exert as much independence as Lucretia. Lucretia also has the intellectual capacity to contribute to political conversations and work through her beliefs and opinions, while Grace usually tries to divert any politically-charged conversation. Once Grace sees the sacrifices that are being made out of love for the country, she too starts to physically take part in the American cause. During a trip to the country to help her father fend off sickness, she tells her brother that politics “is a subject on which I do not love to hear ladies talk, but in these times, it is fitting they should act” (210). Because “Grace models ideal ‘feminine’ behavior,” her death is destined from the beginning of the story (Shannon 83). Grace would have been the survivor in Cooper’s novels, but for Child, Grace’s death is a commentary on the passive, inactive woman. Women must take agency and actively participate in society in order to make or encourage any type of change.

Unlike Cooper’s Sarah Wharton who is pretty and passive, Child actually uses Grace’s death as a social motivator which ultimately results in intense American

patriotism. Child even notes the connection between Grace's death and the American decision to challenge England: "She whom they followed to the grave, was the only daughter of a man that had ever firmly vindicated the rights of America; and she had been cut down, in the full bloom of youth and beauty, by the cruelty of a haughty foreigner, -- a pampered connexion of Hutchinson, --an insolent military oppressor" (278). Grace, who represents the young, innocent nation, is destroyed by Somerville who represents the British threat toward what America will become if the country does not put forth a challenge. Despite Grace's weaknesses, she does stand up for herself, albeit to a very small degree. When Lucretia asks Grace if she would accept Somerville if he were available again, she finally vents her pain and anger, while also admitting her lack of intellect compared to Lucretia's:

No. – I could not respect a man whose principles had ever wavered. I could not entrust my happiness to one whose affection for me had once been shaken. It is a grievous disappointment to find duplicity where we had expected truth; but love cannot remain when confidence has fled. His attachment to you will continue; for your mind is capable of reflecting all the light of his. (252)

Grace's comment is extremely progressive considering the publication date of the novel. Although Grace sees Lucretia's intelligence as a positive trait that would attract a husband, this intelligence and self-assurance is what frequently irritates Somerville.

But perhaps the scene most empowering on behalf of American womanhood occurs when Lucretia publicly shames Somerville during what is supposed to be the glamorous wedding between the two characters. Lucretia, who is described as looking

“more like a victim decorated for sacrifice, than the joyful bride of the man she loved,” makes her most important choice as a woman and as an American by rejecting her British fiancé, disappointing her Loyalist caretakers, and accepting her identity as an American woman (258). Stopping in the wedding aisle, Lucretia exclaims “I can never be the wife of Colonel Fitzherbert. That he sought me for my wealth only, deserved my silent contempt; -- that his falsehood has broken a generous heart, justifies this public expression of scorn” (260). Lucretia’s inheritance is so large that the entire town arrives to witness the wedding; however, they get much more than what they anticipated. Child notes that most of the Bostonians were extremely unhappy that Lucretia, an American girl, was going to marry the conceited, British Somerville:

Many, who from the neighbouring streets had witnessed the commencement of this gala scene, had deeply and bitterly reproached the American girl who could find it in her heart to bestow an immense fortune on one of the hateful oppressors of her native country; and could they have known how ingeniously the haughty Briton had been humbled, they would have drawn her carriage in triumph. (265)

By embarrassing Somerville, Lucretia takes one stand for her country against its British rivals, and to agree with Shannon, this rejection is what finally allows Lucretia to be accepted and embraced by her fellow Americans. In this situation, Lucretia acts as a political agent for her country, openly claiming through her actions that the colonies and colonists are unwilling to suffer from Britain’s greed. Lucretia and Child are similar; Lucretia takes the rare opportunity that women have to speak in public, a marriage ceremony, to condemn her false suitor. Similarly, Child uses the pages of the domestic

novel, one of the few genres in which women's literary voices were socially accepted (but one where readers expected traditional values respecting femininity to be upheld), to address and revise notions of proper feminine behavior. They both use traditional forms to opportunistically couch subversive declarations.

Child, while trying to encourage women to participate in the social and political affairs of the nation, demonstrates how powerful female inclusion can be and challenges Cooper's idea that women had no participation in the fight. While in Albany at an inn with her sick father, Grace realizes that she can also make sacrifices for her country. When the landlady asks if she ordered tea, Grace responds "[n]o, madam, I am an American. . . . I am not very apt to speak on politics. . . . If John Dudley, and all the honest farmers in the country, can refrain from mutton, in order to raise wool enough to manufacture our own cloth, and vex the English merchants, I can surely dispense with the petty luxury of tea" (209). Shannon claims that Child's "characters, far from being limited to the role of Republican wife and mother, are complex, active and thoughtful about their roles as citizens" (76). Although Grace, earlier in the novel, frequently tried to change the subject when politics were brought up between her rebel-leaning father and brother and their Loyalist friends, she finally realizes that being a woman does not prevent her from being assertive and active about her political beliefs.

Shannon argues that *The Rebels* is a political Bildungsroman for Lucretia; however, Child also demonstrates to her readers that women, specifically American women, are important participants in politics and society, while also encouraging women to reject the old European ideals and make decisions for themselves, particularly when those decisions involve marriage. In most domestic novels prior to Child's, the woman

would have married Somerville despite his conceited character and greed, and naturally would have wound up hurt and deceived in the end. Child's novel and characters reflect a changing time and showed women that carefully choosing a partner was actually an option for them. Child demonstrates that female characters and authors have a powerful role in the establishment, growth, and identity of the nation; Child even suggests that female writers and characters "could have as much sway over the identity of an emergent nation as its male lawyers and politicians – indeed, perhaps even more" (Shannon 78). In order to appeal to an audience who may not have had the same advanced opinions regarding female equality, Child creates a partnership between marriage and politics/citizenship as a way of establishing that women's "choice of husbands will serve not only to ensure their personal happiness or misery, but also to predict the future of the United States as a nation. While Grace dies of a broken heart after learning that her Tory fiancé Captain Somerville values wealth over love, Lucretia must reject that same man in order to limit a definition of ideal American citizenship" (79). Child was writing at least twenty-four years prior to the Seneca Falls convention; therefore, having a female character that makes her own decision regarding marriage was an assertive political move on Child's part. Although she masks this dramatic move in the conventional form of a domestic novel, it is still a demonstrative attack on the marriage market.

### **Sedgwick's *Isabella Linwood***

Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *The Linwoods* (1835) is an excellent adventure story of the Revolution set in New York and Boston; however, it is also a mask for very feminist leanings that preceded those of the women's movement a few decades later.

While Eliot Lee is certainly the hero of the novel, many of the women also function as heroes: “When the British penetrate her [Isabella’s] brother’s disguise and wrongly imprison him for espionage . . . it is Isabella and three other women who break him out of jail and transport him back to safety after the diplomatic maneuvers of various men fail” (Karafilis xxx). The female characters are also the more interesting and complex characters who, even in the background of the war, make the most impactful, and dangerous, political moves.

Isabella Linwood is one of the strongest female characters from any of the novels discussed here. For most of the story, she sides with her family and supports the British, but when she sees how dedicated and strong her disowned brother (who disobeyed his father and signed up with the rebels) is, she slowly realizes (with the help of a clearly biased Sedgwick) that the patriots are fighting for a cause they deeply believe in, contrasted by the British who laugh at the poorly dressed, barely fed American soldiers. When she sees how arrogant the British officers are, particularly Sir Henry Clinton, she openly states her changing attitude, a bold move for a young woman: “[b]ut her pride was touched. For the first time an American feeling shot athwart her mind, and, like a sunbeam falling on Memnon’s statue, it elicited music to one ear at least. ‘Have a care, Sir Henry,’ she replied aloud; ‘such sentiments from our rulers engender rebellion, and almost make it virtue. I am beginning to think that if I had been a man, I should not have forgotten that I was an American’” (127). Such a bold statement shocks the men in Isabella’s company; likewise, it lessens the admiration her unofficial fiancé, Jasper, has for her, yet increases the admiration and love the American hero, Eliot, feels for her.



Like Eliot, other characters in the novel are able to see the strength and independence in Isabella Linwood. Lady Anne, who is meant to be Isabella's competition, remarks that Isabella is superior to the other women because she has her own light and isn't just a reflector (a line that is almost exactly the same as what Grace says about Lucretia in Child's novel); while this compliment sets Isabella apart from other women, it is a characteristic that the British characters, such as Jasper, his mother, and Helen Ruthven, dislike about Isabella. Eliot Lee, who quickly falls in love with Isabella, praises her independent and out-spoken character, particularly when she teases him for liking that part of her:

“Then,” said Isabella, somewhat mischievously, “I think you like me for, what most men like not at all – my love of freedom and independence of control.”

“Yes, I do; for I think they are essential to the highest and most progressive nature; but I should not love if it were not blended with all the tenderness and softness of your sex. The fire that mounts to Heaven from the altar, diffuses its gentle warmth at the fireside.” (322)

Jasper realizes he still loves Isabella (or realizes that his options are diminishing) and writes her a letter saying he'll take her back, after his proposal to Lady Anne the previous day has been declined. Isabella also declines, adding a glaring note that Anne had just walked in and “communicated to me the farce with which you followed up the tragedy of last evening” (312). Like Lucretia, Isabella takes the opportunity to shame an egotistic British character and reject his offer of marriage. The final scene shows Isabella and her son waiting for Eliot's return, an image that Sedgwick creates with the intention of

showing her readers that rejecting the aristocratic idea of marrying to maintain (or gain) social status would produce better citizens for the nation.

Sedgwick's female Loyalists are arguably more disgusting and reprehensible than any of the British officers, the despised lower-class Skinners, or the American traitors. Helen Ruthven, who lives in America but is staunchly British, is conniving, selfish, and greedy. Mrs. Meredith, the mother of the roguish Jasper, is as repellent as Helen. Mrs. Meredith is extremely condescending and demands that her son not marry Isabella because the Linwoods' funds are beginning to dwindle. Sedgwick mocks the deviousness of Helen, while also justly punishing Jasper Meredith, when Jasper's only choice is to propose to Helen. Rather than going into detail about the proposal and impending nuptials, Sedgwick makes a humorous, yet cautioning, remark to separate British women from American:

We let the curtain fall here; we have no taste for showing off the infirm of our own sex . . . we would not reveal to our fair and true-hearted readers the flatteries, pretences, false assumptions, and elaborate blandishments, by which a hackneyed woman of the world dupes and beguiles; and at last (obeying the inflexible law of reaping as she sows) pays the penalty of her folly in a life of matrimonial union without affection – a wretched destiny, well fitting those who profane the sanctuary of the affections with hypocritical worship.

While the web is spinning around Meredith, we leave him with the wish that all the Helen Ruthvens of the world may have as fair game as Jasper Meredith. (314)

Sedgwick's message is that American women should not strive to be like their British counterparts. The fact that Helen and Jasper are British is no accident. Sedgwick encourages her female American readers to pursue marriage for love rather than for selfish gain.

Isabella Linwood is certainly the most likeable and respectable of all the female heroines. Karafilis notes that “[i]n *The Linwoods*, unlike in *The Spy* or in *The Rebels*, the heroine's physical and ideological maturation is not eclipsed by that of the hero; Sedgwick maintains Isabella as an active agent participating in the social, cultural, and political transformations of the Revolutionary age” (xix). Unfortunately, a few of Sedgwick's female characters fall flat. Mrs. Linwood lacks any type of personality and submits to the cult of domesticity. She even states to Jasper Meredith that “[a]ll a woman need know is how to take good care of her family and of the sick” (Sedgwick 193). Mrs. Linwood contributes nothing socially, culturally, or politically to the country or the plot and represents the passive, purely domestic model of femininity that Sedgwick and Child encourage young women to abandon.

Despite Sedgwick's strong female character in Isabella, she still must appeal to the readers of her time. At the end of the novel she reminds young women of the lesson they should have learned through the marriage between Helen Ruthven and Jasper Meredith. Even if the political messages of her novel were ignored, Sedgwick wants to at least leave them with good advice so that she can continue to try and build a strong American future: “I shall not have written in vain if I have led one mind more highly to appreciate its responsibilities and estimate its results . . . if I persuade even one of my young countrywomen so to reverence herself, and so to estimate the social duties and ties,

that she will not give her hand without her heart, nor her heart till she is quite sure of his good desert who seeks it" (360). Although Sedgwick's focus is marriage, as is the focus of most female writers during the period, she at least encourages women not to marry for money or because they are told to. Sedgwick expresses to her readers through the marriages between Isabella and Eliot and Herbert and Lady Anne that "in the new United States, rank and privilege will matter less than true love and devotion to the new nation" (Gura 61). Additionally, Sedgwick includes a story about Isabella freeing Rose, who used to be the Linwoods' slave. Sedgwick uses this scene as encouragement for young women to take care of those who may need protection, particularly those who are enslaved or belonged to the working-class. As a free woman, Rose has a completely different outlook on the war than the other Linwood slaves. In domestic novels of the period, "(White) middle-class women were constructed . . . as worthy (and even necessary) guardians of the national welfare, ensuring its wellbeing by extending their domestic pedagogy to otherwise dangerous members of the lower classes" (Robbins 10). Rose does not appear to be a danger to the republic; nevertheless, the impact of Isabella freeing Rose has inspired Rose's patriotism and positive outlook on the freedom that the rebels are supposedly fighting for.

Sedgwick also goes so far as to encourage young women to study the Constitution. Naturally, male readers would have been flabbergasted at such an encouragement and many women would have also been shocked at such an outrageous assertion. However, Sedgwick supplies logical reasoning for making such a claim. Sedgwick inserts in the midst of her narrative,

There are those who deem political subjects beyond the sphere of a woman's, certainly of a young woman's mind. But if our young ladies were to give a portion of the time and interest they expend on dress, gossip, and light-reading, to the comprehension of the constitution of their country, and its political institutions, would they be less interesting companions, less qualified mothers, or less amiable women? 'But there are dangers in a woman adventuring beyond her customary path.' There are; and better the chances of shipwreck on a voyage of high purpose, than expend life in paddling hither and thither on a shallow stream, to no purpose at all. (344-5)

Such a suggestion greatly diverges from the standard model of feminine propriety that male writers like Cooper created. Isabella, like Isabella Singleton in Cooper's *The Spy*, laments that she is unable to serve as a soldier in the army (although her desire is to serve as a Loyalist). However, Sedgwick, unlike Cooper, does not kill off her female character who ventures beyond her traditional domestic sphere; rather, she encourages the character's self-assertion. Isabella, though she is married to the hero in the end in traditional nineteenth-century fashion, flourishes as a character and demonstrates that women can successfully navigate the political world without losing their femininity. By inspiring women to read political documents (and deftly dismissing the possible counterarguments), Sedgwick quite convincingly persuades her readers that politically informed women would be much more productive and useful citizens, thus creating a much more productive and useful nation.

### George Lippard's Feminist Leanings

George Lippard, an extremely popular mid-nineteenth century writer who has been all but forgotten to modern readers, wrote several novels that included depictions of the American Revolution. Lippard had a preference for writing historical fiction and has been described by Reynolds as writing history the way he preferred it, rather than how it actually happened. Nevertheless, Lippard included an intense amount of criticism against American society within his winding, difficult plots and used his novels to voice his radical opinion. George Washington plays a major role in most of Lippard's plots; in fact, Lippard was so inspired and fascinated by Washington that he was given the title of Supreme Washington as leader and founder of his Brotherhood of the Union. In *Blanche of Brandywine; or, September the Eleventh, 1777* (1846), Lippard includes a plethora of Revolutionary figures within his plot, including Washington. Lippard also clearly defines the good and the bad – all the “American” characters fight for justice and protect those who are too weak to defend themselves, while the British are constantly terrorizing weaker characters, aligning with poor villains (ironically with the names Blood and Death), and attempting to rape the young, innocent American women.

At first glance, Lippard's works appear overly masculine and sexually aggressive, a typical description of nineteenth-century sensationalist writers. Leslie Fielder notes

“Excitement” rather than “instruction and delight” is the end sought by the writers of the Popular Literature of the 1840's; and in quest of it, they exploited, with the virtuosity of old pros, two basic human responses: to sex and aggression. Theirs was, that is to say, a kind of fiction thoroughly

sadomasochistic and at least demi-pornographic, though always in terms more political than domestic, more public than private.

While this remark certainly describes Lippard and the novels he writes, I would argue that by incorporating sexual, aggressive, demi-pornographic scenes, Lippard *is* instructing his male readers by encouraging them to avoid acting like the overly sexual, aggressive men in his books. The characters that treat women like prey always die or are severely punished while the American men, who usually treat the female characters with respect and admiration, constantly trying to protect them, end up married to the female “prizes.”

*Blanche of Brandywine*'s typically byzantine plot features several prominent female characters. While most of the novel focuses on the people and battles taking place in and around Brandywine (a Revolutionary battle that took place west of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on September 11, 1777), Lippard's women (Blanche, Rose, Mary, and Isidore) are frequently the centers of attention. The British officers are rarely concerned with war strategy or battles; their main concern is concocting plots to trap and rape the American women, or seeking revenge on the men who have foiled their plans for rape. On the other hand, many of the American heroes find themselves wrapped up in trying to defend these women, often venturing beyond the battle scenes and into homes and forests. Lippard, then and now, is considered a radical writer who focused on social reform. Lippard “considered his fiction another weapon to be used in the struggle, ‘LITERATURE merely considered as an ART is a despicable thing. . . . A literature which does not work practically, for the advancement of social reform . . . is just good for nothing at all’” (Fiedler). Fiedler also indicates that Lippard believed writing could be a

source of awareness and power. Beneath the seduction scenes and descriptions of female body parts, Lippard sends a message to his male readership that, in some ways, mimics Cooper's of protecting American women.

Blanche is a strong female character because she actively resists and fights off Percy – rather than accepting his proposal, she refuses and then spends the rest of the novel running from him and being saved by the man she does love, Randolph (who, we find out near the end, is Percy's brother). In a review of *Blanche* from 1846, the reviewer claims “[t]he principal female character of this romance possesses all those charms by which a heroine is elevated above the common race of mortals, and frequently commands our admiration and sympathy” (“*Blanche of Brandywine*” 314). Lippard's audience obviously appreciated his female characters, Blanche in particular, because they had character. However, did Lippard's audience also understand the reason for his inclusion of such female characters? Lippard's message is that women should have the right to refuse any advances brought on by men and exposes how ruthlessly women are often treated. Lippard also reveals the lack of protection and rights women possess. While Cooper's final message is that American women should be put on pedestals and protected, Lippard exposes the harsh realities undermining Cooper's naïve ideals.

Much of Lippard's novel focuses on the bizarre relationships between male characters; however, many of these relationships deal with the often troubling connections the men have with women. Like the previous three authors, Lippard includes family feuds within his novels; these feuds, however, move beyond political differences and occur mainly between men, often brothers, who are competing for the same woman. Samuels explains that “two cousins, Blanche and Rose, are each courted by rival



brothers, one rebel and Tory” (“Romance” 93). Blanche is never described by Percy without the attachment of “proud” to her description; even within the same conversation Percy labels her as “the proud girl,” or “the proud beauty” (Lippard 189). Rebellion and pride are often considered negative traits by the British men, but Lippard appears to be praising these qualities in women and even includes a proud, patriotic strength in Blanche’s refusal of Percy: “An American maiden is never unprotected from insult!” (120). Clarence Howard, Percy’s equally horrendous sidekick, succeeds in his conquest of Mary Mayland and gladly relates the incident to the officers who request a story: “Captain Howard related the story of the ruined Mary Mayland. He was a handsome man, a splendid looking officer, in short that monster of treachery and meanness, intituled [sic] a man of the world. What was the ruin of one poor peasant girl, to such a glorious Briton as Captain Howard?” (191). Not only are the British and future Americans fighting about the country, they are also fighting for *possession* of the women. Lippard portrays the American men as only wanting to protect the women they love, whereas the British soldiers are actually trying to conquer and possess them.

The theme of possession parallels the imperialist aims mentioned in the previous chapter on Lippard’s depiction of George Washington. Emphasizing the idea of sexual possession and objectivity, Lippard creates intense and graphic physical descriptions of the women in the novel. Lippard has a tendency to focus heavily on women’s physical features, particularly the lips and the bosoms, which aligns with the British officers who are also constantly referring to “possessing” the women, clearly an indication that women are considered possessions to be gained or owned rather than as humans equal to men. Percy, after he has been refused numerous times by Blanche, speaks to her in a personal

monologue that inspires his motivation for the battlefield: “I have offered you wedlock; now you shall accept shame! I have loved you with a pure and spiritual love worthy of an angel. That love you scorned! Now you shall accept the love of a sensualist . . . that love which looks upon a woman, as but a rare delicacy after a feast” (190). Child and Sedgwick praise their female heroines for taking agency in marriage; Lippard, on the other hand, reveals to Americans several years later that the opportunity for women to make choices regarding marriage is not such an easy task and that negative repercussions are often the end result if a man is unable to handle rejection.

Lady Isidore, although she is motivated by love for an unworthy object, is perhaps one of the strongest female characters in the novel. While the American women are constantly running from British men who are trying to rape them, Isidore, a British heiress and ward of Percy’s father, actually dresses in a soldier’s uniform and fights alongside her love, Percy, to whom she is betrothed. She demonstrates that she is willing to be with this man even if it means being with him under the guise of a different gender. Lippard, in his mischievous manner, hides the fact that Frank De Lorme, Percy’s dutiful ensign, is Isidore, providing only slight hints throughout the plot. When Percy and his men arrive at the battle site (which Percy dreamed about as being the location where he would die), he hands out all his possessions to his men, giving Frank/Isidore miniatures of himself and his father, asking him to deliver them to Isidore with the following words: “Now mark ye Frank, and tell her this, for though I never loved her, but with a brother’s love yet Isidore I believe – Pshaw! It will make her happy to tell her so. Give her this miniature – it is mine – and tell her that I died like a man in battle!” (Lippard 189). Although Isidore appears to be a weak female character because she follows a man into

battle and ultimately sacrifices herself for him, she ends up being one of the bravest and strongest characters in the novel.

Isidore makes her own decisions, and despite taking such a drastic step for love, she stands up for innocent women against the “locker room talk” that is going on between Captain Howard and the other soldiers and, with eyes that “flashed like flame-coals,” voices her disgust (though she is still in disguise as Frank) at his actions: “You used *force*, to accomplish your wishes. You are a coward and a villain!” (197). In the seduction and conduct novels that were popular several decades prior to Lippard’s time, a woman’s opinion regarding the threat of and actual action of rape was completely neglected. By having Isidore speak out against the crime, readers were finally given an emotionally powerful female perspective. But even dressed as a man, Isidore must suffer the consequences of speaking her mind; Howard challenges her to a duel and Isidore, even with numerous chances to back out, follows through to “avenge this ruined girl” (198). Isidore demonstrates to readers how men should act and takes on the role of protector. Having been shot and then almost suffocated by looters, Isidore makes her way to a cottage that Percy is keeping Blanche in, where she ultimately sacrifices herself by taking poison that Percy intended to use for a double suicide after raping Blanche. Isidore’s actions are always motivated by her love for Percy; nevertheless, her role is vital to Lippard’s message about women because of her strength, determination, and ability to protect Blanche.

George Lippard focused on women’s rights and frequently portrayed women as highly intellectual beings. Reynolds explains that

[w]hile many popular novelists of his period were writing fiction filled with cherubic girls or sentimentally pious women, Lippard often created heroines who were independent, frankly sexual, or interestingly depraved. . . . In his Revolutionary legends Lippard shows several ‘Hero-Women’ joining men in battle, and in the midst of one legend he pauses to make a semantic distinction popular with many feminists today: “The woman – I use that word, for to me it expresses all that is pure in passion, or holy in humanity, while your word – lady – means nothing but ribbons and millinery.” (*Lippard* 60-1)

In most cases, gender and class intertwine, especially when it determines the type of woman a man is after. All the women who receive attention in the novel come from at least a middle-class family, Lady Isidore actually hailing from upper-class aristocracy. According to Reynolds, “[i]n *Blanche of Brandywine* Lady Isidore, who like several Lippard heroines dresses in men’s clothing, overcomes men in sword fights, while Blanche Walford spiritedly resists lecherous pursuers. The poor women of Lippard’s urban fiction, though buffeted by poverty and tempted by prostitution, usually remain unruffled” (*Lippard* 61). Mary Mayland (sometimes referred to as Polly), always described by the rake Howard as a peasant girl, is the only woman who is actually ruined in the novel and is the only woman to come from the working class. Mary is the exception to Reynolds’s comment and serves as proof that Lippard believes women from all social classes are exposed to the threat of being a conquest.

Lippard’s women have difficult roles, particularly those in *Blanche of Brandywine*. According to Samuels, “Blanche is both the heroine of the novel and its

prize” (“Romance” 93). The women have to focus more on survival than anything else, an interesting message that Lippard exposes for his readers about the current American culture – women should be allowed to do more than simply survive in society. While Child and Sedgwick have encouraging messages for their readers about being a woman in American society (and the opportunity for choices and personal agency), Lippard’s message is a warning and a message of awareness about the dangers women face. By showing how women are constantly pursued and attacked as objects and possessions, Lippard is encouraging men, in particular, to take a careful look at the treatment of women.

### **Conclusion**

As these novels show, women played major roles in the Revolution within the home and in the community. Sedgwick particularly “reminds readers of the important but often unrecognized roles that women played in the Revolution and in forging the republic” (xxx). Edward Tang, in similar fashion, notes that “[m]any women who had lived through the war’s destruction and into the days of the early republic were especially mournful over the lack of recognition for their sufferings” (66-7). Several years after the publication of *The Linwoods* and *The Rebels*, Elizabeth Fries Ellet, out of frustration that women were completely overlooked and rarely recognized for their participation in the American Revolution, collected stories and recollections from actual women who played important roles in the Revolution in her *Domestic History of the American Revolution* (1850) and still serves, alongside Sedgwick’s and Child’s novels, as an important reminder of women’s importance in the war.

Unlike the heroines of Child, Sedgwick, and Lippard, Cooper's women never question patriarchal authority. According to Karafilis, "[i]n terms of its challenge to patriarchal authority, *The Linwoods* is closer to Child's *The Rebels* than to Cooper's *The Spy*. *The Rebels* also depicts its heroines, Lucretia Fitzherbert and Gertrude Percival, as agents who seek to extend the political revolution against patriarchy into the domestic realm" (xviii). Child and Sedgwick, using more conventional narrative techniques, reminded their readers of women's roles in the Revolution; acknowledging women's participation in the war was also a way of encouraging women to continue active engagement in politics and society. One of the main differences between Lippard and the other writers is that he wrote without concern for reception of his work. While Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick write within the acceptable boundaries and trends, Lippard "wrote more to assuage his anxieties over the injustice he saw in society than to please the advocates of any particular fashion in the contemporary field of belles-lettres" (Wyld). Therefore, rather than revealing a woman's importance to the Revolution, he used a Revolutionary background to expose the injustices toward women in the current time period.

With the exception of Cooper, whose female characters abide by the construction of womanhood during the early Republic, Child, Sedgwick, and Lippard have their female characters participate in politics and serve as examples for social reform. While the female writers can certainly be considered advocates for women's rights, they can also be criticized for not going far enough. It was fine to create female characters who challenged the norms and expectations, but those women also ended up dying or married. On the other hand, these female writers can be praised for masking their feminist beliefs

under the conventional structure of domestic novels – strong women who still followed the social protocol of marriage. Lucretia does the unthinkable act of embarrassing and refusing her British fiancé at the altar, but rather than ending up alone, she marries the man she refused earlier in the novel. Many of these female characters reject the characteristics that Barbara Welter outlines in “The Cult of True Womanhood;” thus, Welter’s depiction of what defines a “true” woman may not accurately represent women in the antebellum period. Historians such as Linda K. Kerber have determined that the male and female spheres may not have been that separate. Theoretically, these novelists could have been positing female characters who achieved things that were not possible for real-life counterparts; nevertheless, Cooper, Child, Sedgwick, and Lippard give insight to the ways women may have participated in politics and the important roles they had in shaping industrious and patriotic citizens without compromising the traits of womanhood. For example, Isabella Linwood encourages her brother to be steadfast in his “political and military duties,” even though his father is disowning him; “[b]y authorizing Isabella with such sisterly influence, Sedgwick allows her heroine to assert the supremacy of political over filial duties, while at the same time maintaining the daughter's faultless devotion to her father and keeping her officially out of the realm of political activity, in keeping with the codes of ideal womanhood” (VanDette “A Whole” 419). Luckily, as Salerno notes, current historians have realized how involved nineteenth-century women were in politics, society, and other endeavors, and credits Harry L. Watson for this very realization: “In 2006, Watson stressed that Jacksonian historians ‘can never again assume that women were irrelevant to nineteenth-century public life’” (97). Indeed, even if a woman was strictly confined to the home, she had an extremely

important and complicated duty to maintain the ideals of womanhood while also encouraging those around her to become ideal Americans.



## CHAPTER FIVE

‘All men are created equal’: Racial Divisions, Black Characters, and Slavery in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Spy*, Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *The Linwoods*, George Lippard’s *Blanche of Brandywine*, and William Gilmore Simms’s *Woodcraft*

**Introduction**

The American Revolution furnished a rich historical backdrop against which various literary authors of the antebellum period voiced their concerns about slavery and racial equality, an area of intense controversy in the United States from the Missouri crisis of the 1820s until the secession of the South and the eventual outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Although antislavery emotion is usually linked to the decades leading up to the Civil War, antislavery societies existed in America as far back as 1775 (Salerno 88). In 1833, “[b]lack and white male activists joined William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of the antislavery newspaper the *Liberator*, to write a Declaration of Principles that declared slavery to be a sin and called on men and women to work toward its immediate eradication. The antislavery movement grew rapidly from 1833 to 1837, with dozens and then hundreds of antislavery societies developing across the North” (89). Racial inequality moved quickly to the forefront of America’s concerns, particularly during the late 1850s. Despite being America’s great hero, George Washington owned slaves; most of the American forefathers owned slaves, and they disapproved of racial equality and freedom despite the language they used in the documents declaring America’s freedom. Lincoln, in fact, still receives criticism for his support of sending all blacks back to a

colony set up for them in Africa, a position he abandoned only in the midst of the Civil War (Foner 184).

In this period, we can frequently see abolitionists fervently using the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights against those who supported slavery. Henry Sedgwick, Catharine Maria Sedgwick's brother, supported abolition and, like many others, often criticized the Declaration for its hypocrisy. Charlene Avallone claims "[i]n presenting abolition as a necessary deterrence to otherwise inevitable insurrection, Henry pointed up parallels between the Revolutionary War and blacks' rebellions for freedom to argue that the nation 'should . . . award the justice' for which the colonists had fought" (104). Such an idea is repeated in *The Spy* and *The Linwoods*. Other abolitionist writers, such as Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and William Lloyd Garrison, vehemently fought slavery and, like Henry Sedgwick, compared the fight against slavery to America's fight against the British during the American Revolution. Frequently the rhetoric of the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Declaration of Independence were quoted in opposition to slavery, while the founding fathers were often criticized for their hypocrisy. Douglass, in a Fourth of July oration addressed to the Rochester Anti Slavery Sewing Society often titled "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" addressed such a problem between the meaning of the celebration and black Americans: "What have I, or those I represent, to do with *your* national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?" (Douglass, emphasis added). The fact that slavery existed in a country purportedly based on beliefs in justice, freedom, and human rights was one of the strongest arguments included in anti-slavery literature.

The biggest event to trigger the country's passion about slavery has to be the Missouri crisis and eventual Compromise, although the numerous subsequent rebellions and revolts only fueled the fire between the North and South on slavery. The Missouri Compromise, which created Maine as a free state and deemed Missouri a slave state, caused increased tension and division between Americans, who began passionately siding with political leaders involved in the Compromise. One such American was William Gilmore Simms, who "opposed nullification chiefly because it was espoused by John C. Calhoun. In the 1860's he rejoiced that his state would be the first to secede. His sense of how to preserve history for the present – by recreating it from the past – did not change at all as he composed his romances of the American Revolution from *The Partisan* (1835) to *Eutaw* (1856)" (Bresnahan 574). The South had a dramatically different perspective than the North on slavery and firmly resisted antislavery movements; this perspective is obvious in the literature of Southern authors like Simms, who presents a vastly different outlook on slavery than the other authors included in this chapter. Salerno claims that "[i]n the South, Nat Turner's violent and unsuccessful slave rebellion in 1831 brought new and harsher laws limiting slaves and a new proslavery attitude that silenced most antislavery efforts" (90). The prominent presence of slave narratives that finally gave a small voice to slaves, such as *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), also created tension as more Americans witnessed the evils of slavery from first-hand accounts.

Robert S. Levine, in an introduction to an edition of *Early American Literature* dedicated to the issues of race in America prior to the Civil War, notes that the 1820s should be seen as "a relatively distinctive moment in American history, less a time of

national unification, as suggested by its traditional characterization as the Era of Good Feelings, than of conflict and racial unease” (200). Jared Gardner additionally asserts that racial issues of the 1820s brought an end to the idea of national unity and identity “as the rhetorics of ‘slavery’ and ‘savagery,’ which had long served the cause of nation-building, were brought for the first time to confront the hard facts of slavery and the real dangers – physical and moral – slavery had brought upon the white nation” (84). Slavery created separations not only between whites and blacks, but also between the North and South, clearly presented by the eventual eruption of the Civil War, and between family members, similar to the divisions between family members in the plots of the period’s historical romances. Cooper, Sedgwick, Lippard, and Simms express vastly different opinions on slavery and racial equality in these historical romances. However, these opinions present the diverse perspectives that were held by many Americans during the first half of the nineteenth century.

### **Cooper’s Racial Perspective**

In Cooper’s *The Spy* (1821), slavery does not play a large a role. The slave character Caesar is significant to the story and reveals some of the racism Cooper felt toward men and women “with ‘wool,’” but also shows Cooper making ironic statements about slavery and the slave’s position in society (Gardner 83). Though Cooper’s name and works are often associated with the disappearance of the noble savage, Kay Seymour House, several decades ago, claimed that “Cooper was the first American author to characterize repeatedly . . . the American Negro” (qtd. in Gardner 83). Cooper created, and in many ways popularized, the genre of the historical romance using the American

Revolution; however, he incorporates black characters very condescendingly, and their main purpose in the novel is for comic relief. While Cooper may deserve credit for portraying African Americans, he does so with an extremely stereotypical approach, as if mocking slaves and their positions were his main goal. Karafilis, comparing Cooper's depiction of slaves to Sedgwick's, claims that in *The Spy*, African Americans are "nothing more than stock portrayals," whereas the slave characters that appear in *The Linwoods* take part in political discussions and even, in the case of Rose, selflessly participate (xviii). In terms of analyzing Cooper's opinions of slavery, he brings up the issue as a conversation between two characters who discuss it as a potential stain on the legacy of the war. Unfortunately, one character waves it aside as a problem for the future, thus presenting an even bigger problem regarding race. By pushing aside such a controversial issue and not providing any solutions, Cooper is only adding to the problem.

The reader's first introduction to the major slave figure in the novel, Caesar, occurs in the first chapter when Henry reveals himself to his family in the Wharton home. Caesar, who is most loyal and dutiful to Henry, is described as "[t]he faithful old black, who had been reared from infancy in the house of his present master, and who, as if in mockery of his degraded state, had been complimented with the name of Caesar" (1: 25). Cooper, who realizes and points out the irony of the name he gives to the slave, mocks Caesar throughout the novel, a clear indication that Cooper believed African Americans were not intellectual equals of whites. Caesar is a buffoon, and oftentimes a coward, wringing his hands in fear and panic when chaos breaks out in the novel. Cooper also gives Caesar feminine qualities. When Harvey Birch brings materials for the Wharton

sisters to purchase, Caesar holds the bag and points out what he likes to the two women. However, he does stand up for himself, while also addressing the “rules” of slavery, such as behaving oneself, at rare moments. Birch, when giving news of the war to Sarah and Frances, uses the term “negroes” and immediately gets scolded by Caesar. Cooper’s racism additionally shines through in a second description of Caesar and his wife, Dinah:

The race of blacks of which Caesar was a favourable specimen, is becoming very rare. The old family servant, who, born and reared in the dwelling of his master, identified himself with the welfare of those whom it was his lot to serve, is giving place in every direction to that vagrant class which has sprung up within the last thirty years, and whose members roam through the country, unfettered by principles, or uninfluenced by attachments. (1: 73-4)

By dividing African Americans into two categories, Cooper gives readers a better understanding of his views, not necessarily on slavery, but more so on his racism and views on class – blacks are only productive members of society if they are born into upper-class families and controlled.

For Cooper, race and class go hand in hand. Like Katy Haynes, Harvey Birch’s lower-class housekeeper, Caesar, because of his race and class level, merely serves as comic relief in the novel. Becker argues that “the concepts of law and property in which Cooper ardently believed led him to the assertion that the fugitive slave law was a just recognition of the legal claims of the master” and that

[h]e was inclined, in fact, to view anti-slavery disturbances chiefly as but one more instance of the general movement to undermine society. The

way to escape disaster would be to compel disturbers of the peace to submit to the government and cease “their meddling and wanton invasion of the security and property of their brothers and neighbors.” Thus, although slavery was repugnant to Cooper and theoretically incompatible with his theory of natural right, it came to pass that his limited view of the principles upon which the American Republic was erected obliged him to condemn humanitarian aspiration. (332)

Like Simms, Cooper also believed that slavery was a good method of keeping people in their place, rather than loitering all over the country and asking for handouts.

Slavery also sparks a controversial conversation between the men staying at the Wharton home. After an elaborate dinner where the idea of war is almost completely forgotten by everyone present, the men, which include members of the rebel army and Colonel Wellmere, a British soldier, have an intense debate about the purpose of the war, which ultimately leads to the discussion of slavery. Wellmere points out that the Americans are not fighting for freedom, but for slavery and blatantly asks, “where is the consistency of your boasted liberty . . . is holding your fellow-creatures in bondage in conformity to those laws [of God]?” (Cooper 2: 51-3). Dr. Sitgreaves, the surgeon, advances a counterargument that America is only following in the footsteps of Europe: “slavery is of very ancient origin, and seems to have been confined to no particular region or form of government; every nation of civilized Europe does, or has held their fellow-creatures in this kind of duress” (2: 53). Although Wellmere posits that Great Britain is the exception, Dr. Sitgreaves immediately contradicts him, arguing that “[i]t was her children, her ships, and her laws, that first introduced the practice into these states; and on

her institutions the judgment must fall” (2: 53). Such a truth silences Wellmere; Sitgreaves, on the other hand, ultimately has no answer for slavery and pushes the solution as a problem for future generations to deal with, much like Cooper does: “we must come gradually to the remedy, or create an evil greater than that which we endure at present” (2: 53-4). However, the present is now the past and slavery has emerged as that greater evil. If slavery was an issue in 1821 when Cooper published this novel, he had still not seen how powerful the abolitionist movement would become. The fight against slavery had not gained its full force; had it been a major issue at this point, Cooper may have dedicated more of the novel to this concern.

Although Cooper skirts the issue of slavery, he does include Caesar as part of the family (though certainly not on completely equal grounds). For instance, the Wharton girls allow him to pick out fabric from Harvey Birch’s goods to give to his wife, Dinah, so she can make a new dress. Regarding a general view of slavery, while Cooper “did not approve of it [slavery], he avoided a direct attack, choosing rather to defend a slave-owning America against those foreign critics who, in his judgment, failed to understand the circumstances of its existence in an otherwise enlightened nation” (Spiller 575).

Therman B. O’Daniel explains that

Cooper, on foreign soil . . . was a self-appointed defender of American institutions, whether they were good or bad. He was an aggressive patriot with a “chip on his shoulder,” and was inclined to indulge in fine-spun, meaningless arguments, not to condemn both slavery and serfdom, but to prove that the American evil was better than the European. The “light heartedness” of Negroes, of which he wrote, reveals how shallow his



thinking was and how easily he could “dash off” sweeping generalizations without being acquainted with all of the facts in the case. It apparently never occurred to him that a few Negroes might have seemed happy, but the masses were certainly very unhappy in slavery; or, what was really more true, that those who appeared light hearted were merely attempting to make the best of a very bad situation. (165)

In an interesting parallel to William Gilmore Simms, who defended slavery in the South several years after Cooper’s publication of *The Spy*, Cooper frequently involves Caesar with family functions and makes slavery seem like an institution of protection for slaves; Caesar rarely feels safe or comfortable unless he is at the Wharton home or in the company of the Whartons. In a few scenes scattered throughout the novel, Cooper sneaks in commentary about slavery from Caesar’s point of view. One such scene is a response to Harvey Birch describing “the niggers to the South”; Caesar responds, deeply offended, that “[a] black man as good as white . . . so long he behave himself” (1: 65). This one sentence is filled with contradictory views of race and reflects many of Cooper’s own beliefs in slavery, particularly the idea that a black man or woman can only be equal to a white if s/he *behaves*.

Cooper’s opinion on slavery is difficult to determine based on his descriptions and treatment of Caesar. Bill Christopherson notes that Cooper’s perspective on slavery is hard to pinpoint, even after looking at Cooper’s personal letters. His beliefs may actually parallel those of Dr. Sitgreaves in *The Spy* at the time of publication, though they would change in later years (282-3). Christopherson additionally points out that Cooper would “explicitly condemn the Missouri Compromise in a letter to the South Carolinian William

Shubrick” and predicted that a war over race could be postponed but was absolutely unavoidable (283). Cooper’s depiction of slavery in the historical romance posed a challenge (even a provocation) for writers like Sedgwick and Lippard who had somewhat more enlightened views on slavery and race. Cooper made an effort to debate the slavery issue in *The Spy* with the dinner scene between Colonel Wellmere and Dr. Sitgreaves. This “weak and unsound” argument is representative of how Cooper dealt with the issue of slavery; Cooper felt, via the dinner scene, that “he had won the argument and completely exonerated America, by simply shifting some of the blame for the existence of slavery to England” (O’Daniel 166). Unlike Sedgwick and Lippard, who included much more progressive views of slavery and equality in their historical romances, Cooper points out the problem, even making jokes about it, but offers no solution and merely passes the blame onto someone else.

### **Sedgwick and Slavery**

Catharine Maria Sedgwick takes a unique approach to slavery and relationships between white and black in *The Linwoods* (1835). Karafilis notes that the novel “presents independence not only in terms of political autonomy from Britain, but also in terms of changed social relations among Americans, as she portrays white women and African Americans as sympathetic ‘rebels’ with legitimate political and social claims” (xviii). Sedgwick ventures beyond the conflict between America and Britain to situate America’s contemporary problems within that historical setting and make her current readers aware of the irony of fighting for freedom when certain Americans are left out. According to R.D. Madison’s critique of Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*, “[l]ike her contemporaries James

Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorne, Sedgwick uses fiction to memorialize a past often bogged down in the heavy prose of historical works. Her task is not merely retrospective: in encountering her own past, Sedgwick confronts a present consciously aware of two centuries of history but embroiled in such immediate issues as Cherokee removal” (1). Sedgwick, like the other writers of this period who incorporated the American Revolution as a setting, uses the idea of freedom that was so strong during the Revolution as a way of pointing out the irony of such a word and idea when racism and slavery are still so prominent in America.

Several scholars mention the tension between Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Maria Sedgwick because of Sedgwick’s refusal to avow herself an abolitionist. Nevertheless, it is clear from Sedgwick’s novel that she held anti-slavery views. Ironically, Child does not address slavery at all in *The Rebels*, perhaps because her assertions of choice in marriage and female participation in society and politics were subversive enough for one novel. Sedgwick, however, opens her own novel with a horrendous reminder of the duality between violence and slavery in America, an image of “a gibbet from which blacks were hanged after a slave insurrection was uncovered” (xxx). Sedgwick wastes no time addressing the anxiety that whites would have felt regarding slavery, especially with Turner’s Rebellion (1831) being such a recent event. Avallone highlights the literary choice Sedgwick makes by having Isabella mock her slave, Jupiter, for his fear in seeing the hanging bodies and claims that

[f]or some white audiences, Sedgwick’s making comedy of the historical terrorizing and murder of blacks could relieve the contemporary national mood of anxiety about recent and future rebellions. The scene would

displace to blacks the fear of revolt that troubled whites in the novel's historical context and serve as a timely reminder of the power relations that had historically contained slave revolt. (101)

The scene also serves to remind readers of the horrors and cruelty of slavery; Isabella, who is only a young child at this point in the novel, makes fun of Jupiter's extreme physical and emotional fear of seeing the gibbet.

Isabella's thoughts on slavery progress dramatically as she grows up. Although the following comment comes when Isabella and Jasper are disagreeing about Henry Clinton's offer to save Herbert if he joins the Loyalists, it clearly has insinuations about slavery. Isabella, who is now a young woman, asserts "the time is at hand when the truth that all men are made in the image of God, and therefore all have equal rights and equal duties, will not only be acknowledged in our prayers and churchyards, but will be the basis of government, and of public as well as of private intercourse" (191). Ironically, several pages earlier in the novel, Sedgwick gives readers a brief glimpse at the lack of identity slaves receive in this time period. Jupiter and his friend are discussing the ongoing battles; directing a comment at Jupiter, his friend addresses him as Mr. Linwood. Sedgwick inserts a brief explanation here that "the slaves were in the habit of addressing one another by the names or titles of their masters" (138). Although there is not any elaboration from Sedgwick about how slaves take on the identity of their masters, she inserts her own thoughts on the injustices of such an act later in the novel via Isabella. Through Isabella, Sedgwick makes predictions about the future of slavery in America and the changes that are slowly taking place regarding equality.

The two main slave characters in the novel, Rose and Jupiter, have an interesting conversation regarding the purpose of the American Revolution and the effects that will ultimately also impact the slaves. Rose, who firmly supports the rebels and believes that freedom for America will result in freedom for African Americans as well, has a much more positive outlook on the war, whereas Jupiter constantly criticizes and questions her comments about freedom. Rose remarks that “I would have every man fight on the Lord’s side . . . and that’s every man for his own rights,” and Jupiter’s only response is “La, Miss Rose, then what are them to do what has not got any?” which would have been a valid point for anyone in a marginalized group (139). Jupiter and his friend, whose conversation about the Revolution appears very surface level at first, fully support the British and praise Mr. Linwood for disowning his son for siding with the rebels. Rose, disgusted with Jupiter, responds “can’t you see these men are raised up to fight for freedom for more than themselves?”(139). Jupiter’s argument against such a perspective is that while the rebels claim that “‘a’l men were born free and equal;’ ’e might as well say, all men were born white and tall” (139). By providing these two commentaries from black characters, it is difficult to discern which side Sedgwick agrees with. Including Jupiter’s negative view of what the rebels are fighting for reflects more of what was going on during the time that Sedgwick was writing and parallels beliefs by abolitionists such as William Wells Brown who points out the very same thing in his own literature.

While most Revolutionary authors focus on the contributions of whites, Sedgwick pays homage to slaves and blacks who also participated in the fight for freedom (and who were still engaged in that fight). The image of the slave revolt and a black woman’s discussion of slavery and freedom “suggests that not only white men and women but

African Americans, particularly African American women, made profound sacrifices for personal freedom and therefore were participants in and legitimate custodians of American democratic traditions” (Karafilis xxxii). Although Sedgwick was not an open abolitionist, it can be interpreted through Rose that the American Revolution, despite its many victories, also resulted in major failures, such as not providing freedom to all persons.

Sedgwick also brings up the idea that black women had twice as many difficulties to overcome than the black male. Not only were they excluded from voting because of their gender, but they were also frequently excluded from female anti-slavery organizations because of their color. Black women had very few social or economic opportunities, but these divisions were, and oftentimes still are, dismissed as “reflections of the racial and economic realities of the Jacksonian period” (Salerno 96). Rose, a free slave who continues to work for the Linwoods, is the only black female who receives any significant role in any of the novels presently under discussion. While Cooper mentions Caesar’s wife, Dinah, she mainly stays in the background, except when she is delivering dishes to the table or thanking her mistresses for purchasing cloth so she can make a new dress, and is never given any opportunity to voice her personal opinions about the war or freedom; in fact, Cooper never even indicates that Dinah has any opinions regarding the war or her position. Rose, although she is a free black woman, encounters numerous difficulties due to her race and gender, but actively participates in many events within the novel.

Rose’s most significant contribution to the novel’s message is in her “articulate and ardent discussions of freedom” (Karafilis xxxi). Isabella, when she was only eight,

begged her father to free Rose because, despite being treated excellently by the Linwoods, she remained unhappy due to the “yoke” of slavery (136). In an attempt to “tame” Isabella and force her to apply herself to her studies, Mr. Linwood promises to give her anything she wants if she wins the prize of French scholar – when she does win, her request is that her father free Rose, a request that he laughs off at first. Rose continues to work for the Linwoods, but Sedgwick makes a special note that “her mind was freed from galling shackles by the restoration of her natural rights, and she now enjoyed the voluntary service she rendered” (138).

Rose is also physically active in the novel, and her most important role is switching clothes with Henry Linwood so that he can escape from prison. This is the second instance in the novel where Sedgwick hints at interchangeability between whites and blacks. When compared to Rose’s passionate talk of equality that is currently being fought for in the American Revolution, Sedgwick is perhaps signifying her belief that both groups should have been beneficiaries of the Revolution’s outcome. While this same technique is done in Cooper’s novel (discussed below), Sedgwick makes it different because Rose is a magnanimously strong character who never shudders at the thought of detection. Rose is never a bumbling idiot and is much more threatening than Cooper’s Caesar is. Karafilis points out that “[n]ot only does Sedgwick depict Rose as unquestionably worthy of her personal freedom, but Rose’s critical role in freeing Herbert from unjust bondage places her in a genealogy of black women who work for liberty and the realization of the nation’s founding ideals” (xxxix). Rose is the ultimate hero of the novel.

### **The Trickster Tradition**

In their often oppositional approaches to slavery, both Cooper and Sedgwick offer early representations of trickster tradition. The trickster tradition, first seen in Native American mythology and oral tales, did not appear as a literary trope until late in the nineteenth century. Joel Chandler Harris and later Charles Chesnutt are the most important practitioners of the trickster tale; Brer Rabbit of Harris's Uncle Remus stories is probably the most popular and well-known trickster. However, several years prior to the popularity of trickster tales, black characters, particularly in *The Linwoods* and *The Spy*, partake of this method of fooling those in power, although these trickster characters differ dramatically from the way African American authors purposefully used the trope when it actually became a literary convention several years after the Civil War. However, retroactively applying the trickster tradition to these early novels helps to better understand the black characters who are trying to function in society that is dominated by white men. Harold Scheub notes that "[f]or the trickster, everything is identity" (33). Indeed, identity plays a major role in one's ability to be a trickster; a trickster changes his/her identity for a different one in order to save him/herself from oppression. But the way the trickster technique functions in these two novels is reversed compared to the reasons for which the trickster was eventually created and incorporated into African American literature. Rose and Caesar must switch clothes and pose as other people, not only changing identities but also race, and for Rose, gender, but rather than posing as a trickster to save themselves, they both do it to save the life of a white male.

While the trickster tradition usually applies to African Americans who rebel against oppression from those in positions of power (which in almost all cases were



whites), Rose and Caesar, respectively, partner with white characters also trying to overthrow those in power (the British in *The Linwoods* and the Patriots in *The Spy*), in order to save the lives of white characters in danger. Trudier Harris explains that “[b]y definition, tricksters are animals or characters who, while ostensibly disadvantaged and weak in a contest of wills, power, and/or resources, succeed in getting the best of their larger, more powerful adversaries,” which is exactly what these characters do. Although these writers appear to be empowering their slave characters by giving them active and important roles in the Revolution, the characters are, paradoxically, slyly kept “in their place” by taking on the role and disguise of the men they are trying to save. The trickster tradition in the later nineteenth century was usually used for slaves as a defense mechanism; however, it is reversed, and the disguises and tricks serve as methods of sneaking white characters out of, in both instances, jails. Giving too much power and authority to these black characters would be risking the comfort of the white readership; any discomfort is prevented because Caesar and Rose appear happy to sacrifice themselves for people they love.

Caesar and Rose trade places with male soldiers in order to sneak them out of prison. Harris asserts that “[t]ricksters achieve their objectives through indirection and mask-wearing, through playing upon the gullibility of their opponents. In other words, tricksters succeed by outsmarting or outthinking their opponents. In executing their actions, they give no thought to right or wrong.” Rose is a much stronger trickster because, unlike Caesar, she does not fear the consequences of her actions. Rose not only successfully gets Herbert Linwood out of jail, she triumphs over an extremely aggressive jailer; Caesar, on the other hand, can only cower and literally fall on his own head, which

provides Cooper with another moment of humor at Caesar's expense. Although Rose takes part in this trickery, she is an extremely strong female character who takes charge when the British find out that she has switched places with Linwood. Cunningham, a British soldier notorious for his harsh mistreatment of prisoners, gets more than he bargains for with Rose. When Herbert leaves the prison having changed identities with Rose, Cunningham goes back to make Herbert take some medicine; Rose takes him by surprise and easily overpowers him, thus linking her to the idea of the trickster. In a humorous, but violent, scene, Rose "pulled him [Cunningham] back, threw him down, put her knee on his breast, and by the time he had made one ineffectual struggle, and once bellowed for help, she had added laudanum, castor-oil, and ipecacuanha to the calomel and jalap; and holding his nose between the thumb and finger of one hand, she presented the overflowing bowl to his lips with the other" (329). But this torture is not enough; Rose also puts a noose around Cunningham's neck and threatens to kick the bed out from under him if he speaks or tries to warn others in the jail, a scene that Sedgwick connects with the opening scene of the gibbet. To keep Cunningham quiet for a while, she threatens to tell everyone "you were strung up there by a 'd—n *nigger*' —a *nigger woman!*" (331). To make Rose's moment even more impressive, Sedgwick includes commentary on the evilness of the men in charge of the prison: "Loring [the prison guard] was Cunningham's coadjutor, and is described by Ethan Allen, who had himself notable experience in that prison, as 'the most mean-spirited, cowardly, deceitful, and destructive animal in God's creation'" (330). Rose, in a surprising moment not only of female empowerment, but also black empowerment, brings this notorious jailer to his knees.

Rose's role as a trickster demonstrates her strength as a woman, but also adds humor to a dangerous situation. Knowing Cunningham is a ruthless jailer, we passionately cheer for Rose as she overpowers him and threatens his life. Harris points out that "[t]hough trickster tales in African American culture are frequently a source of humor, they also contain serious commentary on the inequities of existence in a country where the promises of democracy were denied to a large portion of the citizenry, a pattern that becomes even clearer in the literary adaptations of trickster figures." Rose as a trickster is a laughable moment because of Cunningham's terrified reaction to Rose. Such a scene is not just an empowering moment for her black character; it is also an aggressive attack on patriarchal rule.

Cooper's slave character, Caesar, also partakes in the trickster role when he changes clothes, and thus identities, with Captain Wharton in jail. As the two switch clothes, Cooper shows the racism that likely would have taken place had this actually happened during the Revolution, and which also reflects the ideas of race during the 1820s, before abolitionists had really made a significant presence in America. As Caesar undresses, Wharton "took [them] up and prepared to invest himself with [them]; unable, however, to repress a few signs of loathing" (209). Although Caesar is willing (or commanded?) to put his life at risk for the sake of his master, Wharton is unable to exhibit gratitude or prevent his racism from coming through by his disgust of "becoming" black. Caesar is constantly offended by the remarks of Birch and Wharton, particularly when they both demand that he not speak. Caesar responds, "I s'pose Harvey t'ink a colored man ain't got a tongue like oder folk" (209). Cooper only adds to the multiple offenses against Caesar. When Caesar is discovered in the jail taking Henry's place, he is

violently knocked over by American officers. However, Cooper is not concerned about Caesar's safety; rather, Caesar's recognition leads to a moment of mockery by Cooper: "Happily for himself, he had alighted on his head, and consequently sustained no material damage" (214). Cooper's use of humor at this moment only serves as a way of showing, as believed by many people of this period, a separation between the intelligence levels of white and black.

Later African American writers used the "trickster mentality as a strategy for survival with dignity . . . as well as a strategy for political intervention" (Harris). Although Cooper and Sedgwick are not attempting to save their black characters from slavery, they are making a political intervention against oppression. Henry Wharton's and Herbert Linwood's lives are saved by the black characters who exchange identities with them in order to fool the jailors. The trickster role is taken on by Rose and Caesar in order to outwit a type of white master who is not in charge of slaves, but rather prisoners of war. Retroactively applying the trickster tradition to these two novels reveals how black characters exchange identities with white males to trick those in power and is an interesting comparison against novels that used the trickster trope for racial purposes much later in the nineteenth century. Lawrence W. Levine points out that the "African trickster figures were more obsessed with manipulating the strong and reversing the normal structure of power and prestige" (105). While this reversal of power took place between a slave and his/her master, the same can be said of a slave fooling a white soldier.

### **Lippard's Black Sampson**

George Lippard's black character, Black Sampson, from *Blanche of Brandywine* (1846) is one of the most interesting black figures in antebellum literature because of the equal partnership Lippard envisions between Sampson and white characters, yet the way Sampson is described is oddly racist. The few scholars who dedicate space to Lippard's work provide contrasting interpretations of Lippard's perspective on slavery. While Lippard often took up the cause of any group of people abused and neglected by those in positions of authority and wealth, Reynolds argues that he was "more concerned with the white slavery in northern factories than with black slavery on southern plantations" because he feared, correctly, that slavery would fragment the Union (*Lippard* 59). On the other hand, Shelley Streeby in her 2007 study, *Empire and the Literature of Sensation*, claims that "Lippard's radical democratic and antislavery perspective shaped the Quaker City," the setting for Lippard's most popular novel (xix). In *Blanche of Brandywine*, readers can witness both critical interpretations as Lippard combines racist stereotypes, but also positions his black character, Black Sampson, on equal grounds with working-class whites.

Because of the conflicting messages in his writings, Lippard's outlook on slavery is difficult to define; Reynolds characterizes Lippard's attitude toward slavery as "complex" (58). In most of his novels, Lippard addresses slavery but also portrays black characters in terrifying, dark ways by using "racist caricatures" to describe African Americans (Helwig 87). Timothy Helwig argues that "Lippard's working-class protest relies upon an ambivalent engagement with racial discourse" (89). While pointing out the mistreatment of the white, working class, Lippard also frequently protests the treatment

of slaves and blacks by using stereotypes and exaggerated characters. In *Blanche of Brandywine*, Lippard actually aligns the men who belong in the working class with a black character – Black Sampson. Together, these men (eventually dubbed the Oath Bound Five) go after British ruffians to obtain revenge for the death of their friend, Jacob Mayland. The Oath Bound Five kill hordes of British who try to interfere with their revenge, and they even commit torture to kill characters who were involved in the rape and death of Jacob’s daughter, Polly (it is a very Lippardian technique to kill off any female who has been violated – the fact that her violator is a British soldier ensures that he becomes an ultimate villain). Black Sampson plays an equal part in the revenge, a plot that is given just as much importance as the Brandywine battles, and is unquestionably the most emotionally involved in the attack, transforming from a man to a monster when fighting. Although Helwig, one of the rare scholars who gives attention to Lippard, addresses Lippard’s use of “anti-slavery rhetoric” in his city-mysteries, such as the more well-known *The Quaker City*, he fails to highlight Black Sampson, one of Lippard’s most interesting and prominent black characters.

Black Sampson’s physique is often compared by Lippard to that of Hercules and, for modern readers, the comic book and action movie figure the Hulk is an image that Sampson may bring to mind – large, powerful, invincible, and easy to anger. Lippard writes that

the Negro, Sampson, his muscular arms, all bone, all sinew, [were] folded across a chest of Herculean dimensions. His head – with the face of African features, the protruding eyes, the flat nose, somewhat aquiline in contour, the lips thick and large, yet determined or expressive, and the

prominent chin – was slightly turned aside, while the jet black skin glistened in the light. (37)

Lippard also gives significant power to Sampson, the only black character in the novel. Lippard still incorporates several stereotypes, but Sampson is not excluded from travelling and avenging with his fellow countrymen. Sampson is characterized more as a terrifying monster than a man, but he also has his moments of extreme emotion, such as when Mayland is killed. Sampson travels with a giant dog (that actually appears rabid and wild) and a scythe, which he wields as a weapon of mass murder. Sampson, after Mayland's death, goes on a British killing spree and is motivated by anger and sadness at the death of such a wonderful man; Sampson constantly praises and honors Mayland because, as Sampson explains throughout the novel, he showed extreme kindness to Sampson and his family by providing clothing, shelter, food, and friendship.

Lippard's message against slavery may be difficult to discern from a surface reading due to the caricatures and racial stereotypes that he includes in the descriptions, and name, of Black Sampson. Nevertheless, Lippard always incorporates at least one black character into his novels, and as we see in *Blanche of Brandywine*, those black characters sometimes take on very heroic roles, rather than being pushed into the background or used for plot advancement; in fact, "Lippard remains one of the first Americans who protested against slavery in fiction and who fashioned heroic black characters" (Reynolds *Lippard* 59). Despite the extremely racist descriptions that Lippard uses for Black Sampson, he is actually urging white Americans to consider blacks as their equal. Sampson partakes in the same emotions as his white brethren as they band together to get revenge for Mayland's death. Likewise, Sampson is also the leader in the

Avengers' ritual mingling of blood over Mayland's body as they agree to retaliate for his death – the white men in the group follow Sampson's example of sprinkling blood over the body as a symbol of their commitment to revenge. Sampson is not excluded from mixing his own blood with the group's, and none of the white members of the group even flinch at the thought of white and black blood mixing – a potentially radical non-response, given the era's usual paranoia about mixed blood when it occurred as a result of sexual liaisons.

In addition to Lippard's caricatures and stereotypes, he also incorporates black vernacular and history. Historically, slaves were given names by their master as a way of deterring them from establishing a personal identity; although Black Sampson's name is a clear effort by Lippard to establish Sampson's racial identity and difference, Sampson is the only black character in any of the novels mentioned in this chapter to have a past, and an important and regal one as well. Black characters in novels of the Revolution are rarely given the opportunity of voicing their history and background, but Lippard provides Sampson with such a moment not only to give a history of himself and show how important he could be in his own country, but also to fully explain the emotions and reasons for being so passionate about avenging Polly's honor: "Sampson's fader prince in he own country. Some dam man-hunter led him in jist sich a scrape – brought him here – made slave of him. Dat's reason why Sampson's here at Chadd's Ford. Poor nigga – berry poor – hab nuffin' to eat weren't for Massa Mayland – hab nuffin' to wear weren't for Missa Polly" (39). Lippard's readers may not have had the knowledge to realize that Sampson's story is similar to that of many slaves, but for modern readers, Sampson's



story of having an ancestor captured and sold into slavery is a story all too familiar in nineteenth-century literature.

Despite the heartfelt story of Sampson's past, his physical descriptions make it extremely difficult to discern whether or not Lippard condones slavery. Throughout the novel, Sampson and other characters constantly compare him to various aggressive animals – “a mad bull,” “an enraged tiger,” (59), “foaming like some chafed tiger, suddenly let loose from his cage” (223), and frequently Lippard includes imagery of Sampson like an animal prepared for attack: “[t]he negro showed his white teeth. This was always a dangerous sign with Sampson” (294). Lippard even conjures the image of a rabid animal by constantly describing Sampson as having foam oozing from his lips. Like many journalists and novelists during the 1840s, “Lippard had a habit . . . of describing Negroes as comically obsequious, brutish, stupid, and volatile” (Reynolds 59). Not only is Sampson compared to an animal, but he also shares similar characteristics with the devil. Included in many of Black Sampson's descriptions are words that link him to the devil, such as “darkey,” “a debbil,” and “lump of charcoal.” In one description, the animal and devil descriptions merge into one terrifying vision: “The veins on his broad chest writhed like serpents” (310). These are not exactly portrayals that would convince white readers to rush into siding with abolitionists.

Black Sampson can also be compared to the physical manifestation of Death, which modern readers often associate with the grim reaper. Sampson, at any moment of battle, raises a scythe, which is also the weapon of choice for the grim reaper. Sampson is always followed by his white dog, Debbil, who aims for and attacks the enemies' throats and laps up their blood as his final conquering act. Even Sampson's own friends associate

him with a supernatural being: “Sampson, I sometimes take you for a sperrit, and yer dog for a real devil” (134). In another dramatic battle scene, Sampson’s arrival is described the following way: “He came on, looking in very truth like a demon from the fabled hell” (223). Lippard’s descriptions of Sampson may be extreme, overpowering, and frequently racist, but his presence within the Oath Bound Five is strong throughout the novel.

Lippard, who died in 1854, was not able to experience the result of the Civil War that started several years after his death. Had he survived, the black characters he may have produced after the Civil War would probably have had an extremely different tone and description. Although Black Sampson’s descriptions sound like something out of a horrible nightmare, his role in the novel and inclusion within an all-white group was a vast improvement against the typical, bland black characters writers like Cooper created. Sampson has a powerful presence in the novel and demonstrates strength and heroism that is not seen in many of the preceding black characters.

What makes Lippard unique as a writer during this period is his apparent approval of “mixed” blood. In an 1849 issue of his *Quaker City Weekly*, Lippard writes about “the dark land, where white and black slavery, cloaked under various names, blasphemes the memory of the Revolution, and turns the Declaration of Independence into a lie” (Streeby “Haunted Houses”). Although Sedgwick does not go so far as to mix black and white blood, she and Lippard have similar opinions regarding the purpose of the Revolution and the documents that emerged from the war’s success. Helwig, describing Old Royal from *New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million* (1853), a black character similar in size to Black Sampson, claims that “[a]lthough Lippard’s description of Old Royal’s facial features calls up the racist imagery of the 1840s, it does not bear out presumptions of

racial inferiority” (90). In most of Lippard’s novels, his black characters are powerful and do not seem inferior in any way to the white characters. Therefore, including a scene where white and black characters mix their blood together is Lippard’s way of challenging the Revolution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution. The blood mixing is a union between Americans, despite being white, black, or an immigrant. In Lippard’s most famous novel, *The Quaker City* (1845), he “links . . . the oppression of white wage laborers . . . with the oppression of black slaves” (Helwig 94). Thus, Lippard’s message is that, despite documents that declare freedom and rights are for everyone, equality does not truly exist for the poor or for slaves.

### **Simms, the South, and Slavery**

One argument against the type of equality Lippard supports is William Gilmore Simms’s *Woodcraft: or, Hawks about the Dovecote* (1854), a novel written in defense of slavery, particularly in the South. The novel, part of a seven-book series, takes place in South Carolina (a region that is often overlooked in nineteenth-century American Revolution literature) at the end of the Revolution. The novel opens with the Widow Eveleigh attempting to regain her slaves from the British who are packing up to exit Charleston. She senses that her slaves, as well as her neighbor’s, have been wrongly captured and the British, who are trying to secretly keep them in their possession. Meanwhile, as Captain Porgy returns from war, only to find his plantation abandoned and destroyed by the British, he is faced with the difficulty of rebuilding his life – a struggle that many Revolutionary veterans were faced with after the war due to a lack of payment and support from the government. Porgy, along with the Widow Eveleigh and his loyal

slaves, defeats the British, keeps possession of his plantation, and, like the protagonists of most historical fiction novels, lives happily ever after.

Placing Simms's novel in historical context (namely, the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 and the subsequent upsurge in abolitionist sentiment) reveals the "urgent concerns" that Simms voiced in his text "as he wrote at [a] time when South Carolina slaveholders stood embattled against not British but northern (and) abolitionist interests and forces that were growing increasingly more intense" (Hagood 45). To explain the historical importance of his novel, Simms includes a rhetorically manipulative aside late in the novel to criticize a U.S. Senator whose wealth came from the selling of slaves. This Senator, who frequently preaches abolition, has a history closely tied to slavery; his grandfather became wealthy by transporting slaves to America from Africa (Simms 456). In terms of slavery, Joseph V. Ridgely argues that *Woodcraft* may actually be a response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was published two years earlier. Ridgely argues "it was while *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was appearing serially that Simms began composition of the newest in his series of Revolutionary romances, a volume he was to call first *The Sword and the Distaff* and, later, *Woodcraft*" (422). Ridgely additionally asserts that *Woodcraft* was Simms's immediate response to a novel harshly criticizing slavery. Rather than arguing against the negative representation of the South, Simms "chose the positive course of presenting in a work of fiction an extended account of what he conceived it to stand for" (422). Trying to show that Stowe's novel was not an accurate representation of life in the South, Simms's "own direction, then, was plain. Character and event in his story must carry the conviction that here was truth as recorded by a person within the Southern system – not the wrongheaded views of a

Northern outsider who . . . had based her novel upon material which she had had to seek out” (425). Whereas Stowe depicts many of her Southern slave-owners and overseers, such as Simon Legree, Quimbo, and Sambo, as ruthless men, Simms creates Porgy as a master at the opposite end of the spectrum. Porgy treats his slaves like children (i.e., members of the family that can be controlled). But as Ridgely points out, “[s]ome unfavorable aspects of the Old South could be admitted; but, so Simms’s story implies, they were in the long-ago: the time of the action is, after all, 1782. In this early period such faults existed, but they had been winnowed out” (427-8). Simms believed that slavery was good for the African American race – it kept them out of trouble, prevented them from loitering around the country, and disciplined them in terms of religion and social order (Perkins 84). According to Laura Ganus Perkins, “Simms’s ownership of slaves was not problematic for him because he believed that the African-American race was inferior and in need of guidance” (83). Simms’s own personal belief on slavery is reflected through Colonel Porgy, whose slaves are incapable of functioning and surviving without him, yet work together as a family.

The strong familial bond between master and slaves is evident in the novel, particularly in Simms’s description of the relationship between Captain Porgy and his slave Tom (an intentional counter to Stowe), who receives the most attention in *Woodcraft*. Although he is a slave, and is treated as thus, he still frequently interacts with Porgy and his fellow soldiers. Simms writes

[t]he fourth party in this group is a negro – a native African – the slave of the captain; a fellow of flat head and tried fidelity; of enormous mouth, but famous as a cook; of a nose that scarcely pretended to elevate itself on the

otherwise plain surface of an acre of face. . . . Tom had a reputation in camp, for his terrapin soups, which made him the admiration of the whole brigade. He well knew his own merits, and was always careful to be in condition to establish them. (50-1)

In addition to being Porgy's slave, Tom also acts as his trusty side-kick; Tom is constantly at Porgy's side and receives perpetual praise from his master for his cooking abilities. Tom and Porgy even exchange insults as they bark orders back and forth to each other; Porgy exclaims that Tom is an "impertinent scamp" in response to Tom yelling "[w]ha' de debbil mek' [makes] you *holler* so loud, maussa, when I's jis' [just] at your elbow? You t'ink I hard o'hearing, 'cause I got hard maussa, I 'spose!" (176 Simms's italics and brackets). The conversations between Porgy and Tom are humorous, but Tom usually receives most of the mockery and orders. Nevertheless, Simms highlights the camaraderie between master and slave as a rhetorical technique to make slavery sound harmless and appealing.

The teasing continues throughout the novel – if Tom backtalks, Porgy threatens to send him off with one of his sergeants, which Tom rapidly and passionately argues against, another obvious choice by Simms to emphasize the "friendship" between master and slave. When British soldiers threaten to take Tom away from him, Porgy claims that he will kill his slave before he allows him to be in the possession of another man. Porgy protests against Tom's questioning of his faithfulness,

I will neither give you, nor sell you, nor suffer you to be taken from me in any way, by Saint Shadrach! who was your blessed father in the flesh, and from whom you inherit your peculiar genius for the kitchen! Nothing but

death shall ever part us, and even death shall not if I can help it. When I die, you shall be buried with me. We have fought and fed too long together, Tom, and I trust we love each other quite too well, to submit to separation. (183)

At another instance, Porgy exclaims that “I will put a brace of bullets through your abdomen, Tom, sooner than lose you!” (184). While this may appear superficially to be a strong friendship and Porgy always makes these remarks sound funny, Tom continuously appears exceptionally distressed, aghast, and terrified at knowing his master may kill him to prevent any separation between the two men, or realistically, separation between master and slave.

When Porgy and his friends defend the Widow Eveleigh and her slaves in the woods against the ruffians that have been sent to steal, again, the widow’s slaves, Simms also points out how trustworthy and loyal the slaves are as an attempt to convince any Northern readers that slaves are perfectly happy in their positions. Although the British ruffians have caused chaos, and basically created an opportunity for the slaves to make a run for it, they all huddle together for safety and gather back at the wagon they are being carted in. Simms implies to his readers, by including such scenes, that slaves are quite content with their situation – a white master offers protection. To convince his Northern readers of this perspective, Simms “must offer a different moral and familial framework. He sets about devising ways to show slavery as a natural and necessary moral good that sustains family and community in the face of morally reprehensible British and poor white enemies” (Hagood 40). Simms additionally points out the loyalty of a Southern slave to his/her master, and vice versa, when he sends Eveleigh on her way home so he

can stay back and defend her: “Leave me to secure your property, and guard your negroes home. . . . I will confide a few pistols to some of your most courageous negroes – your fellow Sylvester, for one” (142). By including such a scene and having Porgy entrust the slaves with guns, Simms lets his readers know that slaves are so content in their positions that they will even willingly defend their master or mistress and can be trusted with weapons.

Although Porgy seems to think of himself as a very forward-thinking man in terms of the way he treats slaves and regards the institution of slavery, he still owns slaves and makes extremely racist remarks. After he captures the ruffians, he claims they will have a court session according to the rules of the woods; when the ruffians respond that the “niggers aint no jury,” Porgy laughingly responds that the slaves *will* act as his jury: “[t]hese sons of Ethiopia are all good men and true, having an abiding sense of authority and justice. You will find them fully capable of understanding all the facts in your case” (154). Porgy makes a grand production out of this trial. Ironically, Simms gives not just black characters, but slaves, agency as jurors when in reality, blacks in the South were usually only defendants in the criminal justice system. In fact, the first black jurors did not appear until 1860 in Massachusetts while areas of the South worked up until the 1950s to prevent the inclusion of black jurors (Jonakait 115). Simms, through Porgy, makes the trial laughable, and because it would have been nonexistent at this time to have a black jury in the South, ensures it as safe material for his novel. When Porgy arrives at his downtrodden mansion, we again see an interesting melding of slavery and family, affirming that slaves are content, even happy, with their situation and master. The slaves rush ahead of Porgy because they are so excited to be returning to their homes



while Porgy is greeted “by the loud shouts of the negroes who had preceded him, and who now hailed his approach . . . [a]nd the same negroes who had been with him for several hours before, without so much as taking his hand, now rushed up and seized it, with loud cries, as if they were hosts, and welcoming a favorite guest” (175). In an attempt to shush the abolitionists, Simms gives us a heartwarming scene that defies any negative portrayal of slavery and Southern plantations.

Simms’s treatment of slavery in *Woodcraft* is clearly defined for his readers and makes the argument that slavery is not as bad as people, particularly Northerners, make it out to be: “No slave is ever ill treated, none unhappy or uncared for, none unwilling to share the lot of the masters. . . . Instead, expressions of mutual affection between master and slave abound, and several long passages – including the return of a group who have been hiding out in the swamps – accent the joys of reunion rather than the horrors of separation” (Ridgely 430). Simms implies that their entire existence depends on their master. Porgy treats and talks to his slaves as though they are all children; however, despite treating them in such a way, he still considers them family. Porgy’s plantation is depicted as “an Edenic site in which whites care for their dependent blacks as for children, while the blacks prosper under their rule” (Davidson and Reddin van Tuyl 100). For many abolitionists, the convertibility from personhood to property (plantation owners selling their slaves when in financial trouble) was a major argument against slavery. To combat this negative portrayal of slavery, Simms actually shows how much Porgy cares for his slaves by having him mortgage them to Mrs. Eveleigh, who then serves as their protector against M’Kewn. Porgy and Mrs. Eveleigh also use the slaves’ status as property to carry out acts of charity, such as providing “an old negro” and “a

young one” to Dory after her poor, lazy father, Bostwick, dies from smallpox (Simms 509). Simms also indicates quite frequently how jubilant the slaves are once Porgy returns. Simms’s message is that slaves are happy in the position they are in and would never be able to function without white masters to feed, house, and protect them.

To further prove his point that slaves need the protection provided by their masters, Simms uses the British, who were certainly the most hated group during the Revolution, as substitutes for abolitionists. During the American Revolution, many slaves were promised freedom if they joined the Loyalist cause. Unfortunately, as they moved out after their defeat, many “British commanders wanted either to honor their promise of freedom to runaways who had supported their army or to exploit them for personal financial gains” (Lanning 153). The first scene in the novel details the latter motive. As the British commanders are scheming to remove the “plunder” they had collected from plantations, Simms explains that “South Carolina had already lost twenty-five thousand slaves, which British philanthropy had transferred from the rice-fields of Carolina, to the sugar estates of the West India Islands” (6). Comparing the British to Northern abolitionists, Simms repeats the term “philanthropy” to emphasize the irony of “freeing” slaves from plantations, only to use them as wage slaves in the West Indies, or the industrial economy of the North, which would have likely been Simms’s response to abolitionists who claimed to be working on slaves’ behalf. Simms may be altering history slightly by claiming the British are, as the title suggests, predators threatening the peaceful South by stealing slaves for their own financial gain; however, historical records indicate that “British commanders took as many as 800 [slaves] and placed them on ships bound for the West Indies, where they either sold them to Spanish plantation owners or

put them to work on British-owned properties” (Lanning 157). Simms’s fictional representation, coupled with historical fact, removes the possibility of slaves seeking asylum with the British, thus aiding Simms’s anti-abolitionist stance.

Simms’s opinions on slavery and racial equality differ dramatically from Sedgwick’s. Simms, often accused of “Southern self-delusion,” shows in *Woodcraft* his “devotion to Southern imperialistic dreams and the plantation-gentleman ideal” (qtd. in Perkins 83). Completely opposite from Simms, and Porgy, is Sergeant Millhouse and his industrious beliefs, which are reflected in his name. Millhouse’s opinion of slavery mimics the Northern perspective that Simms is writing against. Northerners, who believed that Southerners regarded slaves merely as cogs in an agricultural machine, did not understand the family-like bonding between slaves and masters. Likewise, Millhouse is completely unaware of how to function with Southern gentility and believes that everyone should work as hard as possible to maximize revenue; he cannot understand Porgy’s lackadaisical work ethic and close-knit bonds with his slaves. Porgy, on the other hand, is the epitome of the South, speaking in “proverbs, rhetorical tropes, and biblical quotations” (Wimsatt 74). Porgy believes everyone has his/her place, does not rush to get things done quickly, and treats many of his slaves like family, which is clearly evident when Sappho, his cherished nurse, returns to his plantation. This same Southern way of life is reflected in Glen-Eberley, Porgy’s plantation. For Porgy, “Glen-Eberley is not only a domain to be inhabited; it is also a philosophy to be lived” (Cecil 478). The utilitarian Millhouse, on the other hand, has numerous plans for saving Glen-Eberley, which include kicking out the friends who have no working value (although Porgy appreciates having people on the plantation with the only purpose of entertainment) and convincing Porgy to

marry the Widow Eveleigh, who he believes owes Porgy for saving her son. Millhouse obviously views the world much differently than Porgy, which Porgy is very aware of; nevertheless, Porgy demonstrates Southern hospitality to his friend: “He will house and hive, while I should freeze and starve. . . . As long as I have a home, he must share it” (Simms 352). Simms includes two vastly different views of the Southern plantation in order to highlight those features of it that, in his view, many Northern critics failed to understand. According to Simms, only someone born into a Carolina plantation could truly comprehend the Southern way of life, particularly the connection between master and slave.

Simms had numerous agendas for his writings. He believed that “historians had a crucial role to play in the cultivation of an American literary sensibility,” and used his writings to show the ways America was different from Europe (as well as the differences between the North and the South) by focusing on Southern culture, while also aggressively battling the abolitionists on slavery (Pfitzer 25). Simms promotes his pro-slavery agenda through specific language, as well. Simms elevates Porgy’s language to accentuate the gentility of the South: “[n]ot only does he [Porgy] stand at the center of the novel, he is an empowered figure, representative of his society's cultural center. His speech is not marked by dialect, and it is full of worldly awareness and classical allusion. He shows every promise of being a classic protagonist of Romance—a physically and intellectually noble figure, a southern Natty Bumpo” (Hagood 44). Porgy’s slaves, on the other hand, speak in thick slave dialect, a literary technique which Simms employs for his pro-slavery novel, especially as he tries to persuade his Northern audience of slavery’s benefits. Slave dialect was already used as a literary convention by the time Simms

published *Woodcraft*; however, Simms translates pieces of the dialect throughout the novel, emphasizing the ignorance of his Northern audience about Southern culture and speaking directly to “Northern cultural arrogance” (Allen 498). Nell Marie Nixon asserts that Simms “used dialect as one of his major devices for it enabled him to individualize many of his dialect speakers into satisfying literary characters” (qtd. in Burkett 128). Simms incorporates the slave dialect to provide his Northern audience with an authentic Southern experience; by including a translation of the dialect, Simms, acknowledging his Northern audience’s ignorance, guides them through the complexities of Southern life and slavery.

### **Conclusion**

There are major differences between Simms’s view of slavery and those of New England authors, but one key difference was that Simms had two major goals to fulfill – creating literature that was representative of the South, while also writing in contradiction of abolitionist arguments against slavery. Larzer Ziff notes that the increase in Southern literature came about because, with novels such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* being so popular, national literature didn’t feel so “national” anymore: “[b]efore Garrison started his weekly, *The Liberator*, in 1831, southerners took pride in all American literature, regardless of regional origin, as their literature” (181). Edgar Allan Poe, who had even said that “the literary products of New England were a sectional literature masquerading as a national literature,” struck a chord with Southern writers who then decided it was their duty to create literature with “original native flavor” (Ziff 181). While many New England authors were writing to show the ill-effects of slavery, Simms’s Southern

outlook provides an interesting counterargument to the abolitionist disputes against slavery in the 1850s. In comparison, Sedgwick and Lippard write with the intention of convincing readers that slavery is a harmful institution that goes against everything the country was founded on. Cooper, on the other hand, questions the presence of slavery in America while continuing to perpetuate racial stereotypes and offers no solution to the slavery problem. Cooper's and Sedgwick's messages about slavery may conflict, but they both give power to black characters who willingly disguise themselves with the intent of saving their, current or previous, white master from jail. The characters who participate as tricksters do so not to save themselves, which is the main goal of the trickster, but do so in a similar way – to save the life of a white prisoner of war being oppressed by those in power.

Reading the racial issues in these novels about the Revolution is valuable in terms of analyzing the authors' responses to cultural and social discussions of the period in which they were composed. Though the black characters in these novels ardently reflect the time period and stereotypes about African Americans, there is no twine that binds the authors' attitudes together about slavery. Even authors like Lippard who were against slavery, whether it was enslaving an entire race or a class, created black characters who possessed every stereotype possible. Nevertheless, the awareness these authors brought to their reading public about the injustice of slavery was one step in the right direction.

## CHAPTER SIX

The Skeptics: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, William Gilmore Simms, and

William Wells Brown

**Introduction**

While many of the authors of historical romances between 1820 and 1860 hailed heroes and encouraged unwavering patriotism, not everyone wrote so positively about the American Revolution, the country and its history, and its forefathers. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, William Gilmore Simms, and William Wells Brown present alternative perspectives on the event that created a nation; these men asked questions that many Americans were not willing to answer or acknowledge. Hawthorne, Melville, Simms, and Brown pointed out the negative consequences, or in Hawthorne's case, the negative beginnings, of the American Revolution and highlighted major issues that America still needed to deal with and be reminded of. While most American writers during this period encouraged patriotism and American pride through romanticized notions of the Revolution, Hawthorne, Melville, Simms, and Brown revealed the bleaker side of American history. In the 1830s, troubled by outbreaks of mob violence in Jacksonian America, Hawthorne records the first major skeptical portrayal of the American Revolution. In the 1850s, when the nation was experiencing turmoil over slavery, the other three authors find additional skeptical perspectives, building on what Hawthorne first put forward.

While the authors addressed in previous chapters have lauded the American spirit and heroes, Hawthorne, Melville, Simms, and Brown portray the American Revolution

and its aftermath in a much more negative manner and challenge readers' preconceived notions about popular figures and battles. Hawthorne, in his popular short story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832), reveals a different side to the British, who are usually considered brutes or villains, and portrays the rebels as the ones who were unjust and violent. Melville, in *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* (1855), reflects on the problem that many veterans faced after the war – lost possessions, no home to return to, and a lack of a pension. Melville's veteran provides an excellent comparison with the veteran, Captain Porgy, who serves as the main character in Simms's *Woodcraft* (1854). While Simms's story confirms and perpetuates many of the myths of the Revolution, and is a harsh contrast to Brown in terms of slavery, his veteran's story starts off as a strong critique of the government's treatment of veterans after the war. Although Simms's veteran in *Woodcraft* has a happy ending, Melville is brave enough to write a devastating, yet realistic, ending for his main character Israel Potter that reflects the authentic struggles Potter, and actual veterans, faced. William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter*, published in 1853, vehemently criticizes the founding fathers that other authors glorified, as well as the documents that were produced as a result of the American Revolution. Three years prior to Brown's novel, "the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 served as a powerful reminder of the limits of local antislavery authority in the United States" (Nabers 90). These authors are skeptical of the widespread opinion about the American Revolution that reigned in the popular mind and showed explicitly "what Americans chose to remember or forget about the war, or even how they recollected differently from one another" (Tang 65). Hawthorne, Melville, Simms, and



Brown wrote in order to offer a counter-history against the popular depictions of the Revolution.

### **Hawthorne's Perspective on the Colonists**

Hawthorne takes a different perspective than authors such as James Fenimore Cooper and Catharine Maria Sedgwick and shows us the reality of the impending Revolution in his short story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," written in 1831 and first published in 1832. The story begins with Robin, a country boy, crossing the ferry into pre-Revolutionary Boston to search for his father's cousin, Major Molineux, who has promised to help Robin or his brother become established. Since Robin's older brother will inherit the family farm, Robin goes in search of the Major – the only problem is that Robin does not know where he lives. After asking numerous citizens of the town where he can find Major Molineux and receiving only ill-tempered threats or mocking laughter, Robin finally sees his kinsman being driven down the street in a wagon, covered in tar and feathers. After his initial shock, Robin finally joins in on the town's laughter; he tries to go back to the ferry to return home, but a stranger urges him to stay and make his way in the world without the help of Major Molineux.

There have been numerous interpretations of Hawthorne's story, but most critics, like Michael J. Colacurcio and Joseph Alkana, agree that "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" takes place in the era just preceding the Revolution, despite the obfuscation of a date for the story's events. Likewise, Lewis P. Simpson asserts that the story "is not an allegory; it is a symbolic account of the real American Revolution" (11). Although Nina Baym argues that Hawthorne "was not interested in making history the subject of his

fiction or in creating fictions for the purpose of commenting on the American past,” it seems very apparent that, in this case at least, this was certainly Hawthorne’s motive (*The Shape* 31-2). But E. Miller Budick, while addressing Hawthorne’s use of history, asks why history has such a strong presence in his tales: “The question that must be asked is what literary value Hawthorne’s historical materials serve, what his romance art has to do with history” (218). “My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” and many of Hawthorne’s other works, clearly make use of an historical setting in order to critique not only the past, but also the present. Hawthorne provides readers with a viewpoint of revolution and reveals that the colonists may have also participated in their fair share of villainy and ruthlessness.

The authors in the previous chapters have solely focused on the glory of defeating the oppressors and depict the British as being ruthless and cruel; however, Hawthorne divulges to us that the colonists were not so innocent and partook in violence and revolt. When Major Molineux finally shows up in the street, his appearance, covered in tar and feathers, overwhelms Robin: “His face was pale as death, and far more ghastly; the broad forehead was contracted in his agony, so that his eyebrows formed one grizzled line; his eyes were red and wild, and the foam hung white upon his quivering lip.” The colonists, who are usually portrayed as victims, have now taken on the role of unjust villains, whereas the imagery in most other historical romances gives precedence to the colonists’ perspectives. But Hawthorne, as Melville and Brown do in their own novels, writes with the intention of undoing the myths that have built up around the American Revolution. The public wanted exaggerated tales of grandeur. Colacurcio adds that

*No one* loved to hear of mobs or broils in the street. And nearly everyone wanted to hear that the Revolution had been a major event in Holy History. It would overstate the case only slightly to say that in 1826 (Hutchinson himself to the contrary notwithstanding) all one could discover about the Revolution was that, in the Cosmic Progress toward a Universal Salvation in Holy Liberty, it figured as only slightly less important than the Birth of Christ and the Protestant Reformation. (136)

To say that the Revolution and the heroes involved were exciting and entertaining would be a vast understatement, and Hawthorne set out to tackle the task of challenging the myths by writing with a different perspective.

Identity plays a major role in the novels in terms of depictions of George Washington; however, Hawthorne brings back the question of identity with Robin's decisions in the short story. Simpson argues that "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is the archetypal story of the American Revolution. It is . . . the first concentrated symbolic representation and evaluation of the significance of the Revolution in our literature; for it depicts the decisive emergence of the individual, rational person, possessed of all his unalienable natural rights, out of the old community of kinship and custom, tradition and hierarchy, into the society invented by critical analysis and maintained as an ideological construct. (15)

Robin makes an active choice to side with the crowd, rather than to sympathize with, or even try to save, his kinsman. In making such a decision to reject his uncle, whose presence "becomes a symbol for America's rejected colonial past," Robin makes his first

major decision regarding his identity, which is, ultimately, to side with the rebels (Miller). Hawthorne's salute to identity makes his historical setting and topic extremely appropriate, as well. Writing about America, particularly Boston, prior to the start of the American Revolution is a flashback to an (obviously) important part of America's history, thus the beginning of its own identity. The problem with "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," however, is that it is a harsh reminder of moments that citizens might not be as proud of.

Hawthorne's use of description particularly lends itself to criticism of the colonists and America's lack of acknowledgement of certain events in its past. As the mob continues down the street past Robin, Hawthorne notes "[o]n they went, like fiends that throng in mockery around some dead potentate, mighty no more, but majestic still in his agony. On they went, in counterfeited pomp, in senseless uproar, in frenzied merriment, trampling all on an old man's heart." The other novels show America ignoring the ugly side of its history, focusing only on the heroics and sacrifices that were made. Budick claims that Hawthorne's major message in "Molineux" is that America "will have to acknowledge the past and accept the existence of the past in the present. If America had failed in one crucial area it was in this acknowledging of the importance of the past" (229). While Americans ignored certain elements of their past by inflating only the positive aspects of the war, Budick's argument that they were unaware of its importance seems flawed, particularly because of the numerous historical romances that were being produced and Hawthorne's need to write a story offering up a different viewpoint. In fact, in Hawthorne's story, the colonists are not described as heroes or honorable citizens; rather, this mob is sadistic and animal-like, not the freedom-loving patriots we have seen

before. Miller notes that “Hawthorne reveals no intention of exploring the guilt or morality of revolution in American history.” Nevertheless, his tale serves as a reminder to Americans that the past is not completely guilt-free.

Through “My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” Hawthorne also challenges the notion of simplicity, such as only believing in the myths of the Revolution. The very basic way to think about the American Revolution is that America was being oppressed, the British were the bad guys, and the inexperienced underdogs won. Hawthorne shows us, however, that this is a troubling way to think of the Revolution and that Americans’ preconceptions about the war should be questioned and rethought. Particularly with the presence of the two-faced man, Hawthorne reminds his readers that there are always two sides to every story; Miller draws attention to the two-faced man and describes the two conflicting stories as “consciously two-faced citizens-as-rebels,” thus pointing out that Americans have completely ignored the British perspective, or rather, that America has ignored its own violent participation in events leading up to the Revolution. In the description of the man, Hawthorne writes “[o]ne side of the face blazed an intense red, while the other was black as midnight, the division line being in the broad bridge of the nose; and a mouth which seemed to extend from ear to ear was black or red, in contrast to the color of the cheek. The effect was as if two individual devils, a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness, had united themselves to form this infernal visage.” Although this two-faced “fiend” represents two completely different outlooks regarding the Revolution, he is also a major sign to Robin that something strange and unexpected is about to happen. Alkana points out that the story’s message of a “frustrated expectation that the world will be simple” ultimately leads to a “profound anxiety about the fundamental conditions of order in ‘the

great American state” (2). Hawthorne’s tale anticipates many of the major movements that took place in American history, such as the Civil War and the women’s movement, and parallels the disruptions that took place prior to the Revolution with the rising tensions in his own time.

Even though Hawthorne exposes misrepresentations of the American Revolution, he, like the authors discussed previously, also use the American Revolution to write about a rising issue in American culture – the mob – which appears in many of Hawthorne’s other works, including *The Scarlet Letter*, as well as in Child’s *The Rebels* (Child’s rebels are extremely violent, forming riots in the streets and even burning down Governor Thomas Hutchinson’s house). Alkana claims that “[f]ear of the mob was characteristic of the antebellum era”; such a fear is evidenced in the speeches and writings of Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexis de Tocqueville (3). Mobs and riots became more frequent and much more violent, mostly due to the increase in industrialization and migration, and later became exceptionally violent when mobs formed race riots, which had actually began years before Hawthorne’s publication with the Hardscrabble riot in 1824 (Sweet 353). Paul A. Gilje notes that

white mobs assaulting blacks characterized most race riots. These disturbances increased in the 1830s as abolitionists trumpeted the cause of immediate emancipation and exposed the raw nerve ends of a racist society. The race riots of the 1830s, however, need to be viewed as part of a continuum of disorder that began with the emergence of free black communities, and that persisted into the 1840s, 1850s, 1860s, and beyond.

However, riots similar to the one Robin experiences, while reflecting the anti-abolitionist mob violence of the mid-1830s, likely also happened during the Revolution. According to Andy Trees, when Benedict Arnold's plot was discovered, citizens in Philadelphia expressed their anger against a dummy Arnold, and "[a]rrayed in regimental dress, the mock Arnold was drawn through the city in a cart. Arnold's head was given two faces, and he also had a mask, symbols of his duplicitous treachery" (246). Hawthorne's tale creates an almost exact composite of these images through Major Molineux and the stranger with two faces. Trees also points out that Arnold "was troubling to his fellow countrymen precisely because he was representative of tensions within the Revolution and flaws within themselves" (247). Molineux's dedication to the Loyalist cause created a similar tension for the citizens Robin encounters.

The tendency toward violence appears in Robin, before he even becomes part of the mob, as he encounters numerous citizens who warn or threaten him. After his first negative interaction, Robin exclaims "I might be tempted to turn back and smite him on the nose"; his next interaction results in Robin ranting "if I had one of those grinning rascals in the woods, where I and my oak sapling grew up together, I would teach him that my arm is heavy though my purse be light!" There is also an interesting connection between laughter, the mob, and the lower class, which makes Robin's decision to join the mob's laughter at the end of the story even more powerful. Those in the nineteenth century were often warned against laughter, as "[l]oud laughter is the mirth of the mob" (qtd. in Alkana 15). Robin is laughed away from every stop he makes and ultimately joins in when Molineux finally appears: "Robin seemed to hear the voices of the barbers, of the guests of the inn, and of all who had made sport of him that night. The contagion

was spreading among the multitude, when all at once, it seized upon Robin, and he sent forth a shout of laughter that echoed through the street, --every man shook his sides, every man emptied his lungs, but Robin's shout was the loudest there." Robin, who had previously criticized the townspeople for having inappropriate manners, now takes on the "ill-bred" behaviors of the mob by being the loudest participant in the mob's laughter. The violence in the story, especially Robin's numerous violent responses to the town's citizens, reflects the increase of violence in America. The 1820s saw a rise in labor and class riots, while the 1830s experienced an increase in anti-abolitionist violence with events such as the Farren Riots of 1834. Alkana argues that "Robin's violent impulses might not resemble images of modern urban violence, but in Hawthorne's time they would have conveyed a discomfort that Hawthorne indicates by evoking civility" (14). By connecting past events (violence leading up to the Revolution), Hawthorne very much foreshadows how similar violence (anti-abolitionist riots) will ultimately lead to another war.

Many readers view this story as Robin's progression into adulthood, a very clear parallel between Robin's maturity and the country's decision to separate itself from the "mother" country. Colacurcio even claims that there is no "better backdrop for a rite of personal passage than a nation's own problematic and, yes, ultimately violent transition" (133). But rather than taking the same path as Cooper, Child, Sedgwick, and other writers of Revolutionary romances, Hawthorne's historical text encourages readers to reconsider the popular myths that pervaded the nation's imagination and literature and serves as a reminder that America's beginning (as its own country) should be remembered as an extremely violent past.



### **The Unfortunate Adventures of Israel Potter**

Herman Melville's novel *Israel Potter* (1855) is a fictional account of Potter's adventures, taken from Potter's *The Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter* (1824), which was written down by Henry Trumbull, in an unsuccessful bid to establish Potter's claim to a post-war pension. Melville's version has Potter in constant battle for his freedom. Potter, living in Berkshire, Massachusetts, leaves home to make money because his father refuses to let him wed a poor neighbor's daughter. Potter returns with money, but after his father refuses the marriage again, he joins in 1774 "the regiment of Colonel John Patterson of Lenox, afterwards General Patterson" (Melville 439). After fighting in the battle of Bunker Hill, Potter joins a naval vessel, which gets captured by the British. Potter traverses through England and France, constantly getting captured and always finding a way free, encountering George III, Benjamin Franklin, and Paul Jones. Potter's final adventure occurs as he is forced into the British navy to fight against Americans. After escaping to join Paul Jones, getting left aboard a British ship, and escaping again with Ethan Allen, Potter is left to wander in Europe for forty-five years. When he finally finds a way home, his family has either died or gone west, and Potter is ultimately denied a pension by the American government, dying friendless and penniless.

Melville's novel, like so many of his others, was not well received. Numerous critics, including Peter J. Bellis, approach Melville's *Israel Potter* in order to critique the unsuccessful use of autobiography in the text. Many others agree with F.O. Matthiessen, who "viewed the novel as evidence of Melville's mental and physical exhaustion" (Temple 3). But these critiques are missing many of the key points to Melville's text. With so many historical romances about the Revolution being produced before and

during the time Melville published this novel, he was also partaking in this tradition and providing his own opinion. Bellis asserts that “[b]y invoking the Revolution, Melville positions himself to reinterpret its meaning, to reassert or deny the links between past and present” (“Israel Potter” 610). By reinterpreting this text, Melville argues against the popular opinion of the war and its aftermath. Using Israel Potter’s own autobiography as a jumping off point, Melville fictionalizes much of Potter’s text in order to reveal a major problem that resulted from the Revolution – the veteran. In Potter’s autobiography, he writes that Franklin assures him of remuneration and that it “is the reader’s task . . . to see that the Revolutionary promise is kept, to bring his tale to its just conclusion” (qtd. in Bellis “Israel Potter” 614). Melville’s tale, on the other hand, expresses that the promise given to Revolutionary veterans for recompense was a lie and shows how veterans like Potter were rapidly pushed to the side and easily forgotten. Melville reveals that Americans did not do their part in making that promise come true.

Melville’s novel is constantly criticized for being too over-the-top; despite such an accusation, David Chacko and Alexander Kulcsa describe Melville’s rewrite of Potter’s biography as having a “satiric intent,” which seems quite obvious, especially when comparing Melville’s historical romance against many others (366). Because Melville is clearly critiquing the current American system, such as the lack of pension for veterans, he often pokes fun in creative ways. For example, all the chapter titles in *Israel Potter* have a biblical theme, perhaps to “add historical resonance and pathos” to Melville’s novel (Baker 12). Potter’s name, Israel, and many of the chapter titles make direct parallels between Potter’s wandering and the Israelites, seeking safety from the oppression of the Egyptians. Bill Christopherson points out that “Melville seems to have

framed the novel on his culture's premise that its history and destiny postfigured that of the Biblical Israel; that Americans were a chosen people, brought out of captivity, blessed by God and appointed to a divine spiritual and historical mission." This has certainly been America's perception of itself, dating back to the Puritan era, but Melville and other authors, by exposing all the issues that America should be dealing with, show that America, full of problems of its own, is no different than any other country.

Melville's depictions of American heroes (Benjamin Franklin, Ethan Allen, and John Paul Jones) are humorous and completely overdramatic – another literary choice that critiques American society by portraying each man as an “inflated hero” (White-Major 69). Christopherson argues that the “novel is an indictment against that part of America which could not distinguish between a popular hero and a true patriot.” In *Israel Potter*, Melville “suggests that, while ordinary people like Potter gained very little recognition for their services during the war, heroes such as Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones, and Ethan Allen became publicly honored and remembered by the post-revolutionary generations through many of the nineteenth-century histories and collected correspondences” and therefore “subverts these heroes' public images by exposing their not-so-glorious personal traits” (Tang 74). Melville clearly disapproved of the fact that Americans were being encouraged in literature to meet an unrealistic ideal of American identity. Rather than including George Washington like other writers, Melville writes caricatures of other Revolutionary heroes, such as Franklin, Allen, and Jones, to mimic the unrealistic image of a “true patriot” that was encouraged in historical romances. Like writers who embrace Washington's myth in their text, Melville writes Franklin, Allen, and Jones as dramatically as possible to show Americans the ridiculousness of

mythologizing these Revolutionary figures (for instance, Franklin annoyingly spouts out phrases that sound as though he has taken them directly from *Poor Richard's Almanac*, while he partakes in whatever he has just told Potter to avoid or stop doing). Melville's use of these figures mocks the inflated histories, such as George Bancroft's *History of the United States* (1834), that were popular during the antebellum period and shows the flaws in striving to be like these myths. Gale Temple explains that Potter's "fleeting association with famous Americans dramatizes the ways citizens were encouraged in popular media forms to pattern their relationship to the nation according to the ideals such icons ostensibly represented" (5). Whenever Potter partners up with a "hero," he participates in absurd adventures and is given tasks that normal people would never actually experience.

Potter's struggle with identity reflects the same struggle America had been facing since the American Revolution. Edward Tang argues that, like Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," *Israel Potter* is focused on a major question: "What happens to communities adjusting to the din of post-war nation-building?" (65). In *Israel Potter*, Melville answers such a question with one major claim; veterans, those who sacrificed everything in a war that brought the nation into existence, are completely forgotten. Numerous tales and stories abound about the heroics of these soldiers, but their actual existence is completely ignored. Melville's novel shows us "who was remembered or forgotten within a community" in post-Revolutionary America in the way he writes Franklin, Allen, and Jones versus the tragic end of Potter's journey (Tang 65). Melville's text points out major flaws in the country, which is an interesting perspective compared to the numerous positive accounts of the American Revolution. Christopherson adds to this argument, claiming that Melville is openly admitting that America is no different

than any other country: “If America . . . is not special, then it is like other nations: selfish, brutal, disappointingly human.” In Melville’s jaded view, America is not special, and its citizens should get over the idea that they are any different, or better, than anyone from any other country. Americans should also stop striving to emulate the patriotism of the heroic myths so abundant in fiction and historical texts.

The difficulty of determining identity shows up again with *Israel Potter*, particularly in the comparison between the Melville text and Potter’s own autobiography. Throughout Melville’s text, Potter changes identities, frequently trying to cover up his American one, in order to maneuver his way through England. However, Bellis notes that Potter “is always recognized as an American. . . . Both Sir John Millet and King George III identify him immediately as ‘a Yankee.’ . . . In each case, the encounter becomes a clash of political cultures” (“Israel Potter” 613). Even in disguise, Potter is unable to completely separate himself from his American identity and adapt to English culture, merely tipping his hat to the king, rather than removing it, and refusing to use titles (“Mr.” instead of “Sir”). Describing Potter’s interaction with the King, Melville falls into many of the same habits as the previously discussed authors as he depicts the British, though briefly, in a negative light. White-Major notes that “a lengthy conversation with George III . . . effectively elevates the American soldier even as it takes its jabs at the British monarch,” which differs from the sympathetic view in Potter’s autobiography and ends up “rob[bing] the King of much of the regal dignity that Trumbull’s Potter preserves” (67, 68). But here Melville makes another interesting literary choice by having Potter “redirect the cause of war away from George and towards the English Parliament” (68). After having a relatively pleasant conversation with the King in his gardens,

responding to the King that it was his “sad duty” to kill British soldiers, Potter leaves with “very favorable views” (Melville 460, 461). Showing his readers that the British monarch is not the villain everyone believes him to be based on the depictions in other historical romances, Melville even explains that “had it not been for the peculiar disinterested fidelity of our adventurer’s patriotism, he [Potter] would have soon sported the red coat; and perhaps under the immediate patronage of his royal friend, been advanced in time to no mean rank in the army of Britain” (461). Because of the treatment Potter has received from Americans, the smallest kindness from George III causes Potter’s patriotism and loyalties to waiver; Potter’s depiction of George III refutes Jefferson’s intense indictment of the King in the Declaration of Independence.

Potter dons many costumes and disguises but is ultimately found out in each one. In addition to clothing disguises, Potter even changes his name to cover up his identity. In one England scene, Potter is recognized by “Sergeant Singles,” the man Potter found married to the woman he loved, which is a harsh reminder of, and separation from, his past. In the final line of Melville’s novel, he writes that Potter “died the same day that the oldest oak on his native hills was blown down” (615). This powerful final line serves as a connection between Potter and “the entire Revolutionary generation” (Bellis “Israel Potter” 621). Melville writes that Potter argues that “Israel’s loss of his ancestry and birthright foreshadows the alienation of 1850s America from its own Revolutionary forebears” (622). With Revolutionary heroes gradually dying, Americans were struggling to hold onto that part of their history. But with so many depictions of Revolutionary heroes, Americans also had difficulty forming their own identities based on the expectations set up by these figures. Only when Potter is in the presence of the great

Franklin, Allen, or Jones is his patriotism and identity the strongest; “[w]ithout such icons, Israel seems to lose his identity altogether and becomes instead an amorphous master of disguise” (Temple 12). Melville exposes this strain in American society in the way Potter’s identity is constantly changing.

Melville also offers up some commentary on war that relates to Americans searching for identity. Following a battle between the ship that Potter is on, the *Richard*, and the *Serapis*, Melville closes the chapter with questions for his reader to ponder: “What separates the enlightened man from the savage? Is civilization a thing distinct, or is it an advanced stage of barbarism?” (573). Melville asks in-depth questions of his readers and encourages them to think about “whether individuals have the power to shape their own lives when confronted by larger historical forces” (Baker 11). Seeing how war has affected Potter, readers must now decide how they want to shape themselves and their nation.

### **The Tattered Soldier**

Herman Melville’s *Israel Potter* is an extremely negative portrayal of the American Revolution, particularly its aftermath. While authors and historians like James Fenimore Cooper and George Bancroft relentlessly and patriotically praised the Revolution and its heroes, Melville’s novel takes an opposing stance to show what really happened during the war, and especially, after the war ended. Melville includes numerous descriptions of raggedy soldiers dying in the streets, dressed in disgusting clothing, or fiercely competing with others to get a job barely worth the pay it offers. Like Hawthorne, Melville also provides a different outlook on the British, particularly George

III who stutters and tries to recruit Potter to the British army. However, based on the heart-wrenching ending to the novel, Melville had a major issue with the way veterans were treated, when they were actually acknowledged, after the American Revolution.

Potter struggles for years to find a way back to his home. The first time he saves up enough money, he ends up spending it by getting married, an act that he describes as paying back a “debt of gratitude” for a kindness he received (Melville 607). The French Revolution occurs while Potter is stuck living in England, and when peace finally comes, a multitude of discharged soldiers end up in London, competing with each other for even the lowest-paying jobs. Melville writes another bleak description of the post-war soldier at this point: “some of the genuine working heroes, too brave to beg, too cut-up to work, and too poor to live, laid down quietly in corners and died” (611). None of the veterans receive a hero’s welcome, and many of them are not even acknowledged when they return. Early in the story, Potter makes an ironic statement about the mistreatment he constantly receives from everyone who did not participate in the war: “Ah! what a true patriot gets for serving his country!” (517). This comment comes as he walks around in a raggedy coat, ripped pants, and a topless beaver hat – certainly not the soldier-like image that most people have in their mind. Although Melville includes great heroes, he “represents the ordinary soldiers of the Revolution as the possessors of extraordinary qualities” (Baker 17). Unfortunately, most readers ignored these “ordinary” men and focused more on the big names that were glamorized in history books.

The final description Melville provides of Potter is a realistic depiction of what a veteran would have experienced and is devastatingly heartbreaking: “His scars proved his only medals. He dictated a little book, the record of his fortunes. But long ago it faded out



of print – himself out of being – his name out of memory” (615). Potter is denied a pension and dies penniless, taking on the image of the downtrodden post-Revolutionary War soldier. Joseph J. Letter explores the use of such an image in numerous American texts, explaining that James Kirke Paulding first made the image famous in 1820 as a response to Sydney Smith’s question of “who reads an American book?” Letter notes that “[i]ncreasingly after the War of 1812, Revolutionary veterans were becoming wards of their local communities. The pension question exposed a number of other problems that the young nation had not yet addressed, such as how to care for the first generation of elderly U.S. citizens and whether the federal government bore any responsibility for the poor” (29). While the country figured out answers to these difficult questions, those who were the topics of such questions had to simply suffer, and many of them endured the same ending as Potter, dying penniless and forgotten.

Published within a year of each other, *Israel Potter* and *Woodcraft* contain many similar depictions of the veteran soldier; however, Melville’s tale does not have a happy ending the way Simms’s does. There is no solid evidence that Melville and Simms had any connections; however, it is likely that Melville read some of Simms’s work. Building his novel from an autobiography, Melville was free to write with more skepticism than Simms, who was writing in the established genre of the American Revolution historical romance. Like Melville’s image of the tattered Israel Potter returning home only to find that nothing is left, Simms incorporates a similar image through Captain Porgy, who returns to a dilapidated plantation where all his possessions have been taken. Roger J. Bresnahan, while looking at Simms’s intention of producing novels situated during and after the Revolutionary War, notes that “Americans felt a need to re-examine and re-

interpret their revolution; what had been experienced became memory, and when memory was no longer possible only fiction could preserve historical fact” (573). Simms’s novel, *Woodcraft*, which was only one of an eight-novel series about the war, becomes even more interesting when set against his writings dealing with the American Revolution that came before and after, such as “A Sketch of the Life and Public Services of John Rutledge of South Carolina” (1847), *Life of Nathanael Greene* (1849), and “South Carolina in the Revolution” (1853), all of which idealized, romanticized, and mythologized Southern Revolutionary heroes (Bresnahan 575). James B. Meriwether, who studies the theme of freedom in *Woodcraft* and is one of the only Simms critics to note the importance of the veterans in the novel, asserts that the text is “a grim and sobering examination of the immediate postwar scene, when civil government has yet to be established, where lawlessness is to be found everywhere, and the most crucial problem of all may be that of the reabsorption of the returned veterans into a peacetime, civilian society” (23). Although Simms had numerous objectives in his Revolution series – writing against abolitionists, particularly Stowe and her popular novel, and praising Southern Revolutionary heroes – he includes harsh commentary on the treatment of veterans during the post-war era and the difficulty of adapting to “regular” life.

Simms writes his veteran a happy ending, whereas Melville shows the depressing, but realistic, life of a soldier returning to his “home” after war; nevertheless, the descriptions of Captain Porgy returning home have striking similarities with Melville’s Potter. Simms, in excruciating detail, points out the struggles that many veterans faced as they returned from war; as the British are evacuating Charleston, the American soldiers

are not allowed to be present, perhaps, Simms states, because “they were too *nude* to be seen on such a brilliant occasion” (46). Simms describes the soldiers as

mostly in rags. Their rents of garment were closed by bandages of green moss. . . . They were commonly shoeless and hatless. . . . Badly armed and worse clad, fighting for years amid a thousand other privations, without pay, and almost without thanks or acknowledgment, their achievements slurred over and disparaged, as they have been too frequently since -- while the deeds of others were exaggerated and clothed with a false lustre; --it was apprehended that, with the withdrawal of the enemy, they might be disposed to assert their rights, and do justice to themselves . . . to retire to their homes . . . homes in ruins; --and to sink unhonored into an obscurity which held forth little promise of distinction in the future, and still less of improving fortunes. (46-8)

Amidst the madness of trying to rebuild his home, we get a glimpse of Porgy’s true feelings when he is alone in his room. Seeing and thinking about how rundown his home has gotten,

Porgy knew not that the big tears were gathering slowly in his eyes, and gradually stealing down upon his cheeks. He had reached his home, but it was a home no longer. . . . How was he to redeem the mortgaged acres of his domain? How was he to retain the poor remains of a once ample fortune? . . . He stretched himself out upon his blankets almost reproaching the merciful fate which had saved him from the bullet or bayonet of the enemy. . . . To die, was to escape the cares, the troubles and

the humiliations to which he felt himself unequal. . . . ‘But the wars were all over,’ and this refuge was denied him. He must live and how to live?  
(197-8)

To Porgy and Sergeant Millhouse, the only option left to rebuild his plantation and regain the wealth he has lost is to woo and marry the Widow Eveleigh (which does not turn out successfully for Porgy). Unlike Potter, Porgy actually has remnants of a home and is able to rebuild and reestablish himself with the help of his, also displaced, fellow soldiers.

In addition to his anti-abolitionist theme, Simms asks a major question that had simply been ignored after the Revolution and would be important again when the Civil War began: “what are we to do in time of peace . . . with veterans who seem able to consider only simple – *i.e.*, military – solutions to the complex problems of the post-war period?” (Meriwether 24). Simms provides examples of such problems in two major scenes that involve Porgy and his fellow soldiers (Lance Frampton, George Dennison, and Dr. Oakenburg), and his slave Tom, defending, in extreme military style, his plantation from M’Kewn, who has gained possession of several plantations in Charleston and foreclosed on the property. When Absalom Crooks (another play by Simms on names), the sheriff’s deputy, arrives at Glen-Eberley to give Porgy eviction papers from M’Kewn, Porgy and his gang have the plantation set up like a fort with guards dressed in armor; they seize the sheriff, shave off his beard, and force him to eat the eviction papers. When Crooks returns with additional back-up to arrest Porgy for insubordination, Porgy and his comrades continue their antics in a fake military attack, which for Porgy brings back the thrill of war, “the sally, the shout, the triumph; - never once of THE LAW,” as they wave about pistols, rifles, and sabers (Simms 484). Porgy is scolded by the Widow

Eveleigh and must learn that “flouting of the law is behavior that cannot be tolerated in peacetime” (Meriwether 28). Having served such important roles in a major American event, Porgy and his fellow soldiers have an extremely difficult time shedding that identity.

Despite Porgy’s stable ending, he is an example of how soldiers struggled to adapt to their previous lives after the war; this difficult transition is also reflected in his interactions with women. Porgy tries to court the Widow Eveleigh, but his military habits (smoking and swearing) are shocking to a Southern lady, and she scolds him when he attempts to do either in her presence. The Widow Griffin, however, is familiar with the life of a soldier (and has a lower social status than Mrs. Eveleigh) and makes Porgy feel much more comfortable in her small cottage, which reminds him of the life he recently left behind. Unfortunately, as Porgy settles back into his life, he realizes that Mrs. Griffin is not his intellectual equal, being socially lower than he. Thus, “[l]ife in the swamp has spoiled him for the one widow; life on the plantation ruins him for the other” (Wimsatt 171). Returning home, to what appears to be a bachelor’s haven, Porgy swears to his comrades “I shall live [sic] for you only. You could not well do without me; I will not suffer myself to do without you. You shall be mine always – I shall be yours” (Simms 520). Porgy ultimately finds “companionship in the company of his old army cronies” (Ringe 364). In the bonds of brotherhood and with nostalgia of the Revolution, Porgy and his comrades live female- and law-free at Glen-Eberley.

Many of the more subordinate characters have a greater struggle than Porgy and serve as predecessors to Melville’s Israel Potter; however, they are fortunate in that Porgy becomes their protector. Sergeant Millhouse, for example, becomes dependent on Porgy

and is given the position of Glen-Eberley's overseer. Millhouse, who had his arm amputated on the battlefield by Porgy, has no home to which to return and no family that Simms ever mentions. Millhouse and several other soldiers who had served with Porgy return with him to his plantation and take up residence there; Porgy's plantation becomes "a sort of centre for the parish civilization," especially for those who have no home of their own (Simms 510). Millhouse, who is "a hardworking, thrifty taskmaster who turns Porgy out of bed and into the fields," is the main reason Porgy is able to maintain his plantation (Mayfield 495). Porgy, Millhouse, Dennison, and Oakenburg are unable to function without each other; Porgy explains (to an angry Millhouse) Dennison's arrival in an odd metaphor: "In our great forests, you never hear birds. The smaller birds would become the prey of the larger ones, and they shelter themselves in places which are inhabited in order to be safe . . . Dennison is one of my song birds" (Simms 283). Like his slaves, Porgy's companions are not only there to entertain him, but are now also under his protection from a society in which they can no longer function.

Veterans were not given proper pensions after the Revolution and were often forgotten; however, by the 1830s and later, when Revolutionary War soldiers were becoming scarce, these people became a hot commodity. Tang recounts numerous stories of old men being kidnapped to join Fourth of July celebrations with massive crowds forming in order to listen as veterans gave their war statements (because many men had not officially enlisted and therefore had no discharge papers, they were required to give verbal proof of their service) (68). Americans cared little for the well-being of these heroes; they were only concerned with the glamour associated with the occasions for celebrating the country. Similarly, Melville includes a scene near the end of *Israel Potter*

where, when finally returning to his home, Potter is nearly flattened by a Fourth of July float honoring, ironically, those who fought at Bunker Hill. With such a powerful, and satiric, scene, “Melville suggests that the mythology of the Revolution has completely eclipsed the more complicated lives of individuals like Israel, whose stories, if told (and listened to) would call into question some of the national self-satisfaction associated with Independence Day celebrations” (Baker 21). What follows are crumbling reminders of what his life used to be. No one celebrates his arrival; no one offers gratitude, and eventually Potter, like the other Revolutionary veterans, fades into the backdrop of history.

### **An Infringement on Human Rights**

Hawthorne, Melville, and Simms are critical of aspects of the Revolution, but William Wells Brown’s pro-British stance is the harshest accusation against America. Brown’s novel, *Clotel, or, the President's Daughter. A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853) follows the story of Clotel and her sister Althesa, the illegitimate children of Thomas Jefferson and his slave, Currer, who are being sold after living a life of luxury. Clotel “marries” a white man, Horatio Green, who ultimately leaves her and his child, Mary, in order to marry for political gain. His wife forces him to sell Clotel, but keeps his mixed daughter as a reminder of his sin. After being sold, Clotel and another slave, William, escape to Virginia to rescue her daughter, but Clotel, getting caught, eventually jumps off a bridge and kills herself to avoid being sent to New Orleans. Althesa marries her white master, Henry Morton, but they both die from yellow fever, leaving two daughters, Ellen and Jane, behind. Ellen poisons herself when she is sold as a

slave; Jane is sold and locked away because she won't submit to her master. When her lover tries to rescue her, her master shoots him, and Jane dies of a broken heart. In the meantime, George, also a slave, is in love with Mary, who helps him run away. He ultimately ends up in France and ironically runs into Mary who is a widower; in a convenient ending, she and George get married.

Brown wastes no time describing the irony of Jefferson's daughters on the auction block: "two daughters of Thomas Jefferson, the writer of the Declaration of American Independence, and one of the presidents of the great republic, were disposed to the highest bidder" (*Clotel* 88). Brown inserts sub-plots, or rather, commentary about slavery, chasing runaway slaves, the importance of religion, and the lack of education for slaves as a powerful technique to expose the reality of the institution that Simms had so enthusiastically defended. Brown's depiction of slaves is completely opposite from the happy, singing family of slaves who are protected by their great master Porgy. In a line that sounds as though it has been taken from Porgy's mouth, Brown has his preacher point out how many wonderful things whites have saved them from and the numerous benefits of slavery to his slaves: "Oh, my dear black brothers and sisters, you are indeed a fortunate and a blessed people" (*Clotel* 113). The remainder of the novel points to the hypocrisy of such a statement and establishes why *Clotel* has been "constituted the most profound rethinking of the meaning of the Revolution in 1850s America" (Nabers 86). Amidst the complicated plot, Brown frequently attacks numerous historical documents that claim freedom for all.

Brown's novel deviates from the genre and formatting of all the other novels and stories treated here in that it does not take place during the American Revolution.



Nevertheless, Brown's novel is important to include because it is a strong argument *against* what other authors are praising about America. Brown refuses to write anything positive about America or the Founding Fathers and uses the well-known story of Sally Hemings to critique the period's view on slavery as well as to point out the hypocrisy of the Declaration. Although Thomas Jefferson never physically shows up in *Clotel*, Brown frequently interrupts the story to criticize Jefferson's active participation in slavery compared to his wording of the Declaration of Independence. According to Deak Nabers, the "American Constitution and the legal order it organizes have routinely served as the chief antagonists in the historical saga of American civil rights" (87). Brown lifts the British people high above Americans because of their abolishment of slavery and acceptance of people with a different skin color. Brown constantly compares the British to Americans and laments the fact that African Americans are accepted and even uplifted across the ocean, but are treated like monsters in their own country. Brown's novel reflects the style of the sentimental novel, but he uses it in a way to show the devastating effects of slavery on the slave community. The only slave couple who are allowed to marry and have a happy ending are exiled to Europe where they are accepted.

Brown constantly refers to the Founding Fathers, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence as basic support for his argument against slavery, frequently interrupting his novel in order to insert his voice into the narrative and encourage his readers to truly think about the irony and hypocrisy of the country and its laws. In fact, "Brown begins to suggest that American slavery was the *result* of the American Revolution . . . the Declaration, and the Revolution more broadly, did not merely fail to solve the problem of slavery; they actually contributed to the problem of slavery"

(Nabers 92-3). To be sure, Brown's main goal in his novel is not to create deep, fascinating characters, but rather to "acknowledge the impurity and imperfection of American origins" (Castronovo 524). As readers become intimate with Clotel and her family, it is clear that Brown's intention is to show how horrific, traumatizing, and painful the institution of slavery is. Thomas Jefferson receives the most scolding from Brown who notes, "Jefferson is not the only American statesman who has spoken high-sounding words in favour of freedom, and then left his own children to die slaves" (158). In addition to the previous documents, Brown also brings in other writings by Jefferson, his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) and "Observations" (1786), to reveal his hypocrisy between action and speech. Discussing Mary, who is Jefferson's granddaughter in the story, Brown pulls out certain passages such as "[t]he whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions; *the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submission on the other*" (qtd. in Brown 157). Brown never fails to condemn Jefferson for living in a completely different way than what is so adamantly professed in his writings.

These historical documents are not the only ones that receive Brown's condemnation; he also constantly points out the hypocrisy among slave owners who profess religion. The Reverend John Peck owns several slaves and is determined to convince his school-fellow, Mr. Carlton, that slavery is a fine institution but that slave owners should teach the slaves religion. Trying to convince Carlton of his belief, Peck asks "[w]hy, is it not better than Christian men should hold slaves than unbelievers? We know how to value the bread of life, and will not keep it from our slaves" (Brown 108). Although Rev. Peck constantly preaches religion for slaves, Brown notes that "[a]lthough

Mr. Peck fed and clothed his house servants well, and treated them with a degree of kindness, he was, nevertheless, a most cruel master” (143). After every questionable scene, such as the end of the auction of Clotel and Althesa, Brown posits questions or images for his readers to think about. Explaining exactly what characteristics bring a certain price, Brown adds that this takes place “in a city thronged with churches, whose tall spires look like so many signals pointing to heaven, and whose ministers preach that slavery is a God-ordained institution” (88). Again focusing on the hypocrisy of institutions and written documents, Brown appeals to the items that his white readership would have considered important in their lives and history and would have been reading from frequently. In addition to critiquing these documents, Brown also depicts the entire country as being inferior in its commitment to human rights compared to England. Brown exclaims that “[s]ome American writers have tried to make the world believe that the condition of the labouring classes of England is as bad as the slaves of the United States. The English labourer may be oppressed, he may be cheated, defrauded, swindled, and even starved; but it is not slavery under which he groans” (150). Unlike other writers who write lavishly about America, Brown condemns it as he compares it to life in England:

The prejudice which I have experienced on all and every occasion in the United States, and to some degree on board the *Canada*, vanished as soon as I set foot on the soil of Britain. In America I had been bought and sold as a slave, in the Southern States. In the so-called Free States I had been treated as one born to occupy an inferior position. . . . But no sooner was I on British soil than I was recognised as a man and an equal. (“Narrative”

73)

Brown, like Hawthorne and Melville, shows a different side to the British, a much more open-minded and welcoming group than the vicious, cruel soldiers written about in other novels.

Although white Americans, particularly those who have political power, receive most of Brown's accusations, he does not just critique white Americans. Obviously, race plays a major role in *Clotel*, and Brown weaves into his plot the ability of slaves who are whiter to have more value than others and explains that racism even exists between blacks: "There is, in the Southern States, a great amount of prejudice against color amongst the negroes themselves. The nearer the negro or mulatto approaches to the white, the more he seems to feel his superiority over those of a darker hue" (135). Even in the very first line, Brown makes note of the difference in color by pointing out "there is a fearful increase of half whites" (81). The auctioneer, when selling Clotel, focuses on her whiteness, a moment that verifies how "[w]hiteness has cash value" (Lipsitz vii). National unity was a theme in many historical romances; however, *Clotel* demonstrates rifts between numerous groups – white and black, black and less black. Brown takes it even further, however, to show that racism does not just exist between slaves who are black and those who are white or mulatto. Introducing us to Sam, one of Rev. Peck's servants, Brown blatantly explains that "no one was more prejudiced against the blacks than he" (137). Since Brown was writing mainly for a white readership, pointing out that racism exists even between people of the same race was a writing technique to show how big a problem racism was at the time in the country.

For Brown, America is not the wonderful place that others have made it out to be. In fact, the very nation from which the U.S. secured its freedom, England, is consistently

rendered as superior to the United States. Brown remarks that England accepts everyone; “England is, indeed, the ‘land of the free, and the home of the brave,’” even though America boasts equality (73). Even the Free States are not welcoming places for slaves; George, the slave that *Clotel* has helped escape, is in disbelief that he must ride in the luggage car on a train because of Jim Crow laws. Robert S. Levine notes that “Jefferson the slaveholder was the very embodiment of the contradictory fact that a nation ideologically committed to principles of freedom and equality was also a nation in which slavery was the law of the land” (*Clotel* x). Even Potter in Melville’s *Israel Potter* builds on a similar concept as he traverses between England and France. Although Potter is not an African-American, he receives better treatment abroad in France than he does back at home in America. Ann DuCille notes that “Brown reminds his readers, however, that for George and Mary Green, ‘and numbers of other fugitives from American slavery,’ happily-ever-after is only so long as they remain in Europe; for ‘they cannot return to their native land without becoming slaves’” (444). Such a comment might have reminded Americans that they were not abiding by the statements that America was so focused on – liberty and justice for *all*. Regarding the hypocrisy of America’s founding and the current state it was in, DuCille additionally claims “how ironic it is that the ‘Sage of Monticello,’ who described black women as the preferred mates of orangutans and called on genetic science to prove their inferiority, should be exposed as a ‘nigger lover’” (446). Revealing this side of Jefferson was a colossal attack on the romanticized version of the founding father.

DuCille’s call for scholars to pay more attention to *Clotel* leads her to bring in commentary from the few people who have studied the novel. Quoting and paraphrasing

pieces from Addison Gayle's critique of *Clotel*, DuCille points out weaknesses in his text:

Brown was incapable of portraying anything other than stereotypical images and secondhand ideas. He simply rebutted popular depictions of blacks as brainless, childlike Uncle Toms or lawless 'brute Negroes' with counterimages of beautiful quadroons—romantic images that appealed to whites and to the black middle class, even as they stood in counterdistinction to the black masses under siege. (453)

Considering how many scholars label Brown as the first black novelist, this clearly was a tactic to appeal to his audience, which was white. Based on the numerous appeals and authorial intrusions within the novel, begging his readers to see the evils of slavery, Brown very well knew that his audience would be a white one. DuCille goes on to argue that *Clotel* is “[o]ften historically *inaccurate* and heavily dependent on the borrowed conventions of ‘white’ sentimental fiction” and therefore has never “quite walked the party line of the black experience” (453). Again, considering the year of publication, Brown did not have the leisure of writing to a strictly black audience and needed to make certain choices for his novel to show the blight of slaves while also getting his message across to an audience who was not likely going to immediately side with him. Getting a white audience to read a book that blatantly criticized a popular founding father would have been a difficult enough task for Brown; perhaps we should actually praise Brown for being clever enough to appeal to his audience by using white literary conventions.

Brown includes another popular topic during the period to expose the evils of slavery – womanhood. Much of *Clotel* revolves around the way women are cruelly

affected by slavery. DuCille agrees and writes “[i]n what was evolving as a male-centered discourse constructed around what Frederick Douglass and other male abolitionists called manhood rights, Brown crafted his narrative around three generations of black women” (455). Brown’s intention is to show how psychologically traumatic slavery was to women who were sold based on their physical appearance, as well as their chastity; Brown also focuses so much on women to show how slavery completely destroys a family. In all representations, Brown’s women are, for the most part, strong and determined, “seek[ing] freedom through heroic deeds such as daring escapes and other adventures” (Mitchell 8). Clotel does whatever it takes to try and be reunited with her daughter, Mary, but commits suicide in the Potomac to avoid being captured. Ellen, Althesa’s daughter, poisons herself when she realizes that the man who bought her has done so to use her as a sexual object. Time after time, the novel addresses a major fear for black women: “[f]or Brown, illegitimacy, the result of the ravaging of Black women and the inevitable destruction of the family structure, is a corrupt principle upon which slavery is founded” (11). On the other hand, Katie Frye looks at how whiteness plays an interesting part in the more-white-than-black slaves and the Southern white lady, establishing a clearly defined social hierarchy. Frye reiterates that “Clotel symbolizes the hypocrisy of a social order that puts one woman on an auction block and another on a pedestal, even though they look the same” (qtd. in Frye 532). Mary, who is just as white as her new mistress Gertrude, is forced to work for her, frequently outside, to make her skin darker. Angelyn Mitchell asserts that Brown “introduces the theme of the tragic mulatto to the African-American literary tradition” (9). All the mulatto women in the novel, except for Mary, die with tragic endings, and this character finds itself into most

African-American literature after Brown's publication to show how whites actively worked to make sure anyone with black blood, no matter how white s/he was, was put in the role of a slave.

Similar to the white veteran, African Americans who had served in the Revolution received even less consideration. In fact, even today very few materials exist about the importance of African Americans in the war. According to Tang, "John Greenleaf Whittier remarked in 1847 that African Americans who had fought against the British Crown 'have been quietly elbowed aside, as no more deserving of a place in patriotic recollection' than others who had participated in the Revolution" (67). To be sure, there were no African American heroes who were lauded the way Washington, Franklin, Allen, or Jones were. Brown pays homage to one of these should-be heroes, Crispus Attucks, who "was the first that fell in Boston at the commencement of the revolutionary war" (161). Rev. Peck's daughter, Georgiana, eventually marries Carlton, and during a discussion where she argues that the slaves have more right to American soil than whites, she adds that the only thing black veterans received for their courage and sacrifices is "[c]hains and slavery" (161). Even the Fourth of July served as a painful reminder that the freedom won from the American Revolution did not technically apply to everyone. Anne Baker points out that "[a]s slavery itself became the subject of increasingly heated debate over the course of the decades leading up to the Civil War, the Fourth of July came to be seen by abolitionists as a day ideally suited to pointing out the nation's failure to live up to its promise of liberty for all. By the 1850s, fiery anti-slavery speeches had become a Fourth of July tradition;" later in 1854, at the same rally Thoreau gave his "Slavery in Massachusetts" speech, William Lloyd Garrison went so far as to burn a copy



of the Constitution as a protest (9). Brown, having been an escaped slave, clearly had an immediate and urgent relationship with slavery, and by “manipulating the discourses of American politics and history,” exposes the hypocrisy of the American documents that promise freedom and liberty to all (Castronovo 526). Though many claim that *Clotel* has its share of flaws, it boldly and passionately brings to light for American readers the major problems of slavery in a nation that fervently boasts about its freedom.

### **Conclusion**

Not everyone happily accepted the faultless depictions of the Revolution and its heroes. The authors discussed in this chapter, though writing fiction about a very memorable event in American history, do so to analyze the “relations between art and politics, representation and revolution” (Bellis “Representing Dissent”). Hawthorne, Melville, Brown, and Simms write to portray the reality of flaws in America’s social, political, and cultural systems and beliefs. Budick, when analyzing the historical importance of Hawthorne’s tales, makes the crucial assertion that “[t]o achieve real freedom the American nation will have to release itself from the pride not only of class but of youth and newness and self-confidence, the pride of aliveness itself. It will have to acknowledge the past and accept the existence of the past in the present. If America had failed in one crucial area it was in this acknowledging of the importance of the past, in owning, and owning up to, its history” (229). Americans were more than willing to accept the positive outcomes but often ignored anything negative associated with the Revolution.

Unlike other writers who mask their concerns beneath glamorous tales of adventure and heroism, these authors take away the fluff to reveal their concerns and to show their readers the realities that are frequently overlooked because of exaggerated Revolutionary myths. It is painfully clear from unmasking these texts that America between 1820 and 1860 was experiencing dramatic change that unnerved many. Hawthorne, Melville, and Brown all write with the intention that Roy Harvey Pearce discovered of Hawthorne several years ago, of “alert[ing] the reader to the sort of language or habits of perception that have erased all ugliness from the historical memory” (Colacurcio 132). The writers mentioned in this chapter take a more direct approach to their subjects, including scolding narrative intrusions or outright satire and irony that, when analyzed closely, show the truths that hide behind the great American myths that emerged from the Revolution. Like Brown who writes “to show as many horrors of slavery as he can,” Hawthorne, Melville, and Simms, also expose the horrors involved in America with the beginning and end of the American Revolution (Rosselot).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Concluding Remarks

By analyzing historical romances that were published in America between 1820 and 1860, we find that history significantly influenced and inspired authors to address their concerns about the nation's current and future status through literature. The eight texts analyzed in this dissertation reveal a close relationship between political, cultural, and social events and the type of fiction authors chose to write. As Erkkilä points out, scholarship on this period of American literature focuses too often on individual works and individual authors, when, in fact, these texts are naturally in conversation with each other as evidenced by the shared topic of the American Revolution, the shared genre of historical romance, and the shared technique of masking person opinions, beliefs, and messages beneath stories of adventure and heroism. Erkkilä points out that "Matthiessen, Lionel Trilling, and other Cold War critics sought to keep separate," rather than analyzing side by side, "literature and history, aesthetics and politics, imagination and world" (19). However, when these texts are analyzed together, the conversation not only becomes more interesting, but it also adds to our knowledge of the time period and gives scholars and casual readers a better understanding of the conflicts and tensions taking place in antebellum America.

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