

A MOOR'S "UN-TWAINIAN" INSIGHTS ON COOPER'S "UN-READABLE" ART

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Abstract: In this article, I argue that James F. Cooper should be treasured outside the stifling artistic horizons of Mark Twain's Cooper's Literary Offences. Even if Cooper's texts are allegedly delirium tremens, global readers of world literature should join me—a post-colonial and global student of world texts and contexts—in disregarding Twain's claims that "Cooper has scored 114 offenses against literary art out of a possible 115" (4). My present defense of Cooper should therefore be seen as an international homage to James Fenimore Cooper from a North African "Moor" whose Ibn Battutian global academic journey from the South of the Mediterranean to the American Midwest was triggered by the 'unreadable' Cooper some twenty years ago.

And if I can go down to the grave with the reflection that I have done a little towards it (America), I shall have the consolation of knowing that I have not been useless in my generation (Letters of James Fenimore Cooper, xviii).

Nearly two decades ago, while conducting my primary research for my *Diplôme d'études approfondies* in American Studies at the American Cultural Center of Tunis, I developed an enormous interest in James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-1845): the great pentology of the American wilderness set between 1740 and 1804. My most sought-after objective at that time was to track some textual links and references that would lead me to theoretically explore Cooper's *The Leatherstocking Tales* from a postcolonial perspective. However, upon encountering Fredric Jameson's intriguing book *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981) at Columbia University's Butler Library during a Summer research visit to New York in 1999, I decided to undergo a soft "paradigm shift," from my then rather one-sided theoretical background—at least as it increasingly seemed to me—to a more eclectic research project in which I can use my knowledge of postcolonial theory in conjunction with other historicist theories that foreground discourses of nation, race, and empire.

Working on James Fenimore Cooper had not been an easy task, to say the least. In the minds of many, Cooper is not a Hawthorne or a Melville. Admittedly, apart from the popular

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The Last of The Mohicans, few can remember that there was once a great American novelist and interdisciplinary thinker by the name of James Fenimore Cooper. Indeed, questionnaires I passed around at the time confirmed that while many knew the film version of *The Last of the Mohicans* and its director, few could recognize the author. Of course, even if one can always relate the neglect of Cooper to the sweeping visualization of the American culture, one cannot deny the existence of a latent anti-Cooperism among many American academics. In fact, I still remember how defensive of Cooper I was during a short conversation I had with a professor of American history at my American university of the time.

To make the long story short, the eloquent professor was stunned when I told him that I flew thousands of miles from my home North African country just to write about James Fenimore Cooper and get into, if possible, a prestigious PhD program in Comparative Literature with focus on East/West medieval and early modern encounters. He was impressed with my PhD research project, but repeatedly would utter: “The unreadable Cooper!” Cooper’s alleged unreadability, I have always contended, dwindles when compared with his political engagement with his “American mission,” as once eloquently phrased by Anne C. Loveland (245).¹ In fact, Cooper’s literary heritage, more than any other, represents compelling evidence of the intriguingly complex connection between literature and ideology as propounded by materialist critics from different backgrounds such as Terry Eagleton, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and Fredric Jameson.² It is, therefore, the political Cooper I was fascinated by, not the Shakespearian Conrad!

Scholars of early American literature have always discussed the dissatisfaction of the pioneering American writers in their struggle to consolidate the literary independence of the United States of America and culturally contain the wilderness. In essence, their dissatisfaction was the result of what appeared to those writers as the meanness in the American materials, in comparison with that of Europe. Joel Barlow, Washington Irving, and Charles Brockden Brown all expressed their doubt about creating a respectful and independent American literary tradition that could stand up against the cultural hegemony of Britain. This impeding doubt, however, was stalwartly confronted with a full awareness of

¹ See also Kay Seymour House, *Cooper's Americans* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1965), George J. Becker, ‘James Fenimore Cooper and American Democracy.’ *College English* 17(1956): 325-334 and more recently Russ Castronovo, “James Fenimore Cooper and the NSA: Security, Property, Liberalism,” *American Literary History*, 28 (2016): 677-701.

² For an informative essay on the relation between ideology and literature, see Michael Moriarty, “Ideology and literature Journal Michael Moriarty.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11 (2006): 43-60.

the urgency to create of a national literature that could fashion a pure and solid American identity. This identity was necessary in compiling this double mission of resisting the British cultural heritage and taming the wilderness. As Sarah M. Corse writes, "It is my argument that the emergence of a national literature in both Canada and the United states was concomitant with the initial period of nation-building" (9). It was the intricacy of this national mission that led many writers to express their fear of the failure of establishing an American literary tradition.

It was, however, the fortunate destiny of American literature to find in its early days, a committed man of letters and politics like James Fenimore Cooper. In fact, Cooper courageously accepted this mission and significantly helped in fashioning an American national subject not the least because he was "the principal interpreter of his period," to quote Perry Miller's eloquent phrase (*Errand Into the Wilderness*, 214). In spite of Cooper's awareness of the modesty, if not the meanness, of the American socio-historical reality in comparison to the English counterpart, Cooper was optimistic about an independent American literary tradition's potential for success. For Cooper, it goes with saying, the American literary independence was as nationalistically important as its political one.

In discussing the emergence of early national American literature, Robert Spiller notes that that early major American writers were caught in the dilemma of preserving their "loyalty to the English tradition" and meeting "the demand for the totally new literature" (53). With Cooper, Spiller asserts, the American writer began to concentrate on the demands of the national literature. Cooper strove to proclaim the literary independence of America and took it upon himself to textually engage with the hopes and impediments of the rising nation (Spiller, 69). Declaring the literary independence of America was not an easy mission due to the strong bonds that connected the newly independent nation to its mother culture. Not only was a total rupture with Britain culturally impossible, it was also threatening since it could create a cultural and a racial vacuum, which by its turn could jeopardize the Eurocentricity of the rising nation. A unique national language and culture, which often play key roles in nation building and in the consolidation of postcolonial societies, were both absent in the American scene. "In the first place, whether we think of Brazil, the USA, or the former colonies of Spain. Benedict Anderson writes, "language was not an element that differentiated them from their respective imperial metropolis," Benedict Anderson writes, "all, including the USA, were Creole states, formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent. Indeed, it is fair to say that language was never even an issue

in these early struggles for national liberation (47). Fully aware of his country's "postcolonial" situation, Cooper confesses the inevitable British cultural influence on the rising American nation.

In one of his most provocative political tracts, *Notions of the Americans* (1828), a travelling Cooper strongly encourages young American writers to accept the British heritage without anxiety and as he puts it, "[t]o claim Milton and Shakespeare and all the masters of the language for his countrymen as an English man" (855), as he puts it. This grandly reminds one of the quasi-proverbial statement by W. E. B. Du Bois' eloquent call to Afro-American writers to claim the white heritage of America as their white compatriots would do. As he put it, "I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm and arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls (83).

Cooper was fully alert to the danger of blindly following the cultured British and the educated English man. In Cooper's mind, American writers must espouse a bardic nationalism, to quote Katie Trumpener's eloquent phrase. In other words, such an ambitiously vital national project could only be achieved if his fellow countrymen commit themselves and their writings, as he did, to the American nation. The success of this national project, as Cooper theorizes, hinges on engaging American literature to narrate the American political experience and values. "The only peculiarity", Cooper tells us, "that can or ought to be expected in [American] literature is that which is connected with the promulgation of their distinctive political opinions" (*Notions of the Americans*, 865). Cooper deemed the promulgation of the American political experience and values as the most important American literary theme. If it was unlikely to break the historical, cultural, and linguistic bonds with the mother country, the new national literature had to concentrate on the political.

Much influenced by his call on his fellow American writers to rely on what he hails as "the impulses of talent and intelligence," to overcome all the above-mentioned obstacles, Cooper had successfully subdued his romantic talents to serve this national project of establishing an American literary tradition. He did so by exploiting the romance's generic power of national idealization and by striving for the literary independence of America. In several aspects, it was Cooper's obsession with American politics which encouraged many to hail him as the first national American writer par excellence even if he was initially

criticized for his alleged "unrelenting criticism of contemporary America and his insistence on importing politics into the province of polite literature" (Rans, 71).

Cooper's romantic politicization and idealization of the rising American nation should draw the utmost attention of modern readers to this once major American writer. Our understanding of Cooper's narrative can benefit from materialist theories which focus on nation building and the concomitant discourses of politics, race, and empire. Cooper's romances, one might venture to say, more than any others in post-revolutionary America, exemplify a postcolonial situation. For Cooper, the American nation, is a narration that loses its origin, "in the myths of time and only fully realize," its horizons in the author's textual eye, to use Homi Bhabha (1). In several aspects, one can say that Cooper's romances are American odysseys that narrate an America that is independent, but also powerful and potentially imperialistic, an America that conjures up narratives of the Greek and Roman epics, or say, the Arthurian Romances (in their narration of Britain).³ Such a powerful national idea drove Cooper to profess writing, as illustrated in the above prefatory statement.⁴

Little wonder, then, that Cooper, projected a romantic idea of America more than any other writer, giving the rising American literary tradition a national color, infusing it with the political, social, and economic interests of the young country. Cooper's commitment to the idea of America was the telos of his writing. "It was the very faithfulness of Cooper to his conception of an ideal republic," remarks Vernon Louis Parrington, "that brought him into collision with his fellows and filled his later days with bitterness. To the end of his life the social and political problems of America were a burden on his conscience" (225). If the American Revolution had internationally declared the political independence of the United States of America, Cooper heavily relied upon the romance to declare its concomitant cultural independence from Britain. "The true burden of romance," Perry Miller explains, "was not at all the love story. What all of them were basically concerned with, was the continent, the heritage of America, the wilderness" (31). One might metaphorically say that the romance with Cooper is the mirror that introduced the American subject to itself and reflected for the first time an independent image from mother Britain. This introduction,

³ See Patricia Clare, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

⁴ It is often claimed that Cooper wrote only as a challenge to show his wife that he could write better than Jane Austen.

however, became much more challenging of the ‘mother’ than what Jacques Lacan proposed in his interpretation of the subject’s first self-encounter during the “Mirror Stage.”⁵ With Cooper, the American subject goes beyond any complex relationship with Britain to embark on a state of total independence, of asserted subjectivity. In this context, Emily Miller Budick observes, “But Cooper touches the heart of the American subject, directing his steps away from the path pointed so unerringly by America’s magnetic attraction to England” (17).

The burden was enormously heavy on Cooper in absence of an independent pre-colonial cultural heritage that could have helped regain a lost “imagined community,” if one borrows Benedict Anderson’s exquisite description of the nation. The ambiguity of the postcolonial situation of the United States of America, which was prescribed by its cultural and historical ties with Britain, made the mission much more difficult and very different from other postcolonial societies. In traditional colonial/postcolonial societies, the resistant/emergent nations in their struggle for independence and national consolidation strive to propagate a glorious pre-colonial national condition. Frantz Fanon calls it “national consciousness,” whereby a national culture is the most influential (97). This romantically re-imagined past has been instrumental in postcolonial consolidation and the invention of what Eric Hobsbawm, calls “national tradition” (7). This is true when it comes to inventing a glorious tradition of a national history, of a common origin, of a national religion, and a national language. Postcolonial societies seek to recreate a “paradise lost” from their common pre-colonial past to strengthen their national independence, sustain their national existence, and narrate a national history. As noted by John McLeod:

If the invention of tradition is central to the nation, then so is the narration of *history*. Nations are often underwritten by the positing of a common historical archive that enshrines the common past of a collective “people.” The nation has its own historical narrative, which posits and explains its origins, its individual character and the victories won in its Name (70).

Indeed, Cooper found himself in such a precarious postcolonial situation: How can the emergent American national writer remove or even break the British mirror which is “always already there” through its hegemonic language and culture? How can the American

⁵ For a comprehensive summary of Lacan’s “Mirror Stage,” see B. Fink, “The Subject and the Other’s Desire,” in *Reading seminars I and II – Lacan’s Return to Freud*, eds Feldstein R. et al., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996: 76–97).

writer recreate an American national culture that would consolidate the American national consciousness?

Through his frontier romances in general and *The Leatherstocking Tales* in particular, Cooper was the first American writer to gain national and international fame. One can say that Cooper was the first American writer to succeed in breaking the colonial mirror and announcing the rise of the American subject. Marius Bewley groups him with Hawthorne, Melville, and James. Richard Chase hailed him as the founder of the American tradition: "Inevitably," writes Chase, "we look to the writings of James Fenimore Cooper, for it was he who first fully exemplified and formulated the situation of the novelist in the New World" (37). Cooper's reputation, one must admit, is not indebted to a superlative literary genius, like Mark Twain certainly was. It is, however, intrinsically connected to his nationalism and his lifelong commitment to the idea of America.

The Leatherstocking Tales were published between 1823 and 1842. They include *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1841), and *The Deerslayer* (1842). Each of them narrates a period in the life of a quasi-mythic American pioneer, who is interchangeably called Natty Bumppo, Hawkeye, Deerslayer, and Leatherstocking. Historically speaking, each of the *Leatherstocking Tales* covers a different period of American national history: the colonial period, the war of independence, National consolidation, and territorial expansion. Because of the preeminence of historical allusions, many critics have agreed upon describing the tales as historical romances. The genre of historical romance is thought to be the personal invention of the Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott, whose *Waverley*—which many cite as Cooper's model—announced the rise of historical romance. In this context, Leslie Fiedler tells us: "The historical romance is the invention of one man, Sir Walter Scott; and the genre did not exist until the appearance of his *Waverley* in 1814" (160). Fiedler goes on to inform us "Cooper is eminent among the followers of Scott" (160).

Scott's influence on Cooper has been the focus of a heated debate between a group of critics that claims Cooper's strong admiration of Scott and another group that argues for the very opposite. As early as July 1826, W.H. Gardiner, one of Cooper's earliest reviewers, discerned Scott's influence on Cooper in a review he wrote for the *North American Review*. "Our author (Cooper) has uniformly followed the example of the great lord (Scott) and master of modern romance," Gardiner wrote, "in endeavoring to relieve his reader from the more painful and serious emotion of the tale by introducing some uncouth and unnatural

beings, bearing no imaginary likeness to anything on the earth or under it” (109). James Beard, the editor of Cooper’s letters, questions the veracity of this theory through investigating a letter Cooper sent to Sir Walter Scott in 1825 from St. Ouen in France, in which Beard discerns an ambivalence in Cooper’s feeling towards Scott. “Cooper’s admiration of the *Waverley* novels, he claimed, “had been a decisive influence on his literary career, and in Scott’s heroic efforts to pay his debts, Cooper undoubtedly found a deeper and more personal sense of kinship with Scott. Yet despite his admiration, Cooper was apparently always somewhat ambivalent” (154).⁶

Not only was Cooper’s admiration of Scott ambivalent, it also harbored a latent antagonism. Cooper was upset at being thought of as a mere follower of Scott and thus a mere American imitator.⁷ Sympathizing with Cooper and recognizing his literary independence, the nineteenth century French magazine *Paris Globe* advocated Cooper’s romantic talent and even extolled him over Scott: “If we are now to make a comparison between the two novelists, not as between an original and a copy, but as between two powerful rivals, we should say that we prefer the American to the Scotsman” (127). Cooper’s obsession with declaring his personal literary independence offers compelling evidence of his overall national project of declaring the literary independence of the American writer from.... His undaunted obsession with executing his ambitious project of “the mental independence of America” ought to be the standpoint of our appreciation of this major American writer and man of state (?). Such a major nationalistic project was threatened by the peculiarity of the American postcolonial situation due to its strong linguistic, racial, religious, and historical ties with the ex-colonizing power.⁸ Fortunately, it was the overt nationalism that encouraged and motivated Cooper in his lifelong struggle to declare the literary independence of the rising nation.

Cooper’s services to the rising nation, as he confessed, had even superseded his services to his God. In 1846, in a moment of nationalistic crisis, Cooper avowed to his friend James Kirke Paulding: “if I had served my god with half the zeal I’ve served my country, it would

⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of the debate, see Joseph Rezek, “Cooper and Scott in the Anglophone Literary Field: The Pioneers, the Heart of Mid-Lothian, and the Effects of Provinciality,” *ELH* 2011 (4): 891-916.

⁷ In this context, Nicholas Mills quotes Cooper’s confession to one of his friends the following truth: “If there is a term that gives me more disgust than any other, it is to be called, as some on the continent advertise me, ‘the American Walter Scott’” (155).

⁸ Other cases were Haiti and other countries of Spanish and Portuguese America.

have been better for me" (xviii). This confession, however, does not in any way undermine Cooper's faith in the idea of America, as one might conspicuously discern from another letter he wrote the same year to his friend Samuel Center Hall: "And if I can go down to the grave with the reflection that I have done a little towards it (America), I shall have the consolation of knowing that I have not been useless in my generation (xviii)."

Narrating the American nation, inventing an American tradition, and consolidating an American national consciousness were indubitably political priorities for Cooper. The nation, with all its symbols and metaphors, consumed consciously and unconsciously all his life and his writing. Through breaking the colonial mirror that used to confine America to the image of the mother culture, Cooper, more than any other American writer, helped to decolonize the American mind, and liberate the American subject. As movingly captured by the prefatory quotation, James Fenimore Cooper's reputation is not indebted to a superlative literary genius; it is rather related to a lifelong commitment to narrate romantically the American nation. Such a romantic idea of the nation had indeed consumed much of Cooper's life and writing.

Indeed, among James Fenimore Cooper's five *Leatherstocking Tales*, *The Pioneers* has drawn attention from literary critics, historians, and cultural analysts. As a matter of fact, it was not surprising at all that the 1996 Pulitzer Prize in history was awarded to the historian Alan Taylor for a historical study he made on Cooperstown based on *The Pioneers*. *The Pioneers*, some critics still contend, has long been an autobiographical romance. Its paramount importance, according to them, lies in the pastoral moments that reach the apogee with Cooper's description of the landscape of his hometown Cooperstown. Cooper's nostalgic and romantic recollection and recreation of his early childhood and his reminiscence of his charismatic father Judge William Cooper, the founder of Cooperstown in 1790s, used to be the focus of critical interest in this text. Stephen Railton, to cite an example, in his psychoanalytic reading of *The Pioneers* comes to a psychoanalytical conclusion that *The Pioneers* is ultimately the result of Cooper's recollection of his childhood in his father's settlement in his early childhood. The autobiographical centrality is even stressed by Cooper. In fact, in an explanatory letter to the British famous nineteenth century publisher John Murray in November 1822, Cooper seems to blame himself for projecting into the romance much of his childhood. Cooper informs us: "I had announced the work as a 'descriptive tale' but perhaps have confined myself too much to describing the scenes of my own youth" (85).

Cooper's written confession might be a proof that there is more in *The Pioneers* than the romantically autobiographical, as it is a hint that the descriptive cannot be the telos of the narrative either. The autobiographical unconscious that Cooper seems to blame cannot, in any way, impede us from exploring the novel's much more influential political unconscious. Cooper's political unconscious can be thoroughly exposed by using quite loosely Fredric Jameson's theory of the political unconscious. In his seminal essay "On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act," Fredric Jameson argues that although traditional literary criticism did not fundamentally preclude some of the social, historical, or even political investigations of literary texts, the output was strikingly ahistorical, asocial, indeed, apolitical. The problem, according to Jameson, is that "old historicists" conceived of the social, the historical, and the political idealistically and humanistically.

"In a word," Adam Roberts argues, "this is what the 'political unconscious' is: it is history, present in every text but rarely evidently so" (77). It is, therefore, mandatory, as Jameson propounds, to historicize the act of writing (narrative) and politicize the act of interpretation (criticism). The text is a socially symbolic narrative that historicizes a society's individual and collective consciousness. This latter unconsciously tends to repress many historical contradictions in its search for cultural, economic, and political hegemony.⁹

It has been my conviction that *The Pioneers* is not merely an autobiographical romance per se that has encouraged me to investigate its political unconscious and to show that this early nineteenth century American cultural production is nothing but a narrative that is socially, historically, politically a symbolic act. It is therefore the political reading as delineated by Jameson that can help us uncover Cooper's political unconscious in *The Pioneers*. This reading does not seem applicable because Cooper is overtly a political writer. It is, however, my contention that in *The Pioneers*, everything is social, historical and "in the last analysis," political. And above all, Cooper was the son of a famous post-Revolution politician who had indubitably bequeathed to him not only a thriving Cooperstown but also a growing interest in the politics that governed the town. "As the son of a land agent and as someone brought up in a pioneer community," Robert Clark observes, "Cooper had a more immediate and problematic knowledge of the political economy of U.S expansion than any of his literary contemporaries" (962).

⁹ I am fully aware that some would argue that the Jamesonian unconscious is essentially hidden and cannot be associated with any conscious ideology.

As such, it is not exaggerating at all, to argue that the nineteenth-century's critical dissatisfaction with Cooper's literary quality—which reached its climax with Twain—was not only a shortsighted liberal reaction to Cooper's politicization of romance, but also an undermining of the role of the political in the making of one of the great American writers.

At that time the politicization of the romance was thought to be a literary "sin." The nineteenth century's and even the early twentieth century's critical conception and reception of the romance were predominantly liberal humanist. In fact, many early reviews of Cooper's romances expressed their disappointment with Cooper simply because, most politicized as they thought, the political always consumes the romantic in Cooper's fiction. He was thought to politicize such an apolitical genre as the romance. In this context, George Dekker in his investigation of the critical recognition of Cooper between 1820 and 1852, tells us that among the dissatisfaction of the reviewers was their feeling that Cooper committed an "artistic sin" when he treated serious political issues in *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*. "The complaint that a romancer should have turned social critic is common to most reviewers of both novels," Dekker informs us, "because Cooper was considered the national romancer, he was condemned for expressing political and social realities in fiction...among all the inconsistencies of Cooper's reviewers, their conviction that politics is inadmissible in fiction remained unaltered" (27). Yet, it is time to hail what used to be considered sins in Cooper's romances, not the least because by exploring such presumed sins one might uncover Cooper's political unconscious and appreciate Cooper's literary corpus beyond the liberal humanist horizon.

From the beginning of the romance this tension is intensified by the dispute over who killed a deer. Judge Temple, who is accompanied by his daughter and heiress Elizabeth, who has just finished her education, shoots many bullets at a running deer. The deer continues to run until two rifle shots kill it. One of Judge Temple's bullets hits a young man who emerges at the scene with Natty Bumppo and the Indian Chingachgook. Shocked at knowing that one of his bullets has mistakenly hit the young man, the judge and his daughter convince the hesitant young man—who is later identified as Oliver Edward—to return with them to their mansion for treatment.

After so many quarrels and confrontations between the judge and Natty that reaches its climax at the pigeon scene, the judge and his agents [law and progress] overpower Natty Bumppo and his agents [chaos and backwardness]. The romance ends up with three dramatic events: the death of Chingachgook—last of his tribe—and the exile of Natty

Bumppo after his imprisonment, and more importantly the marriage between Oliver Edwards and Elizabeth Temple. Judge Temple Marmaduke founded Templeton whose survival, consolidation, and progress hinge on the judge's political success in dealing with many threats within and outside it. Read from this perspective, one might say, that *The Pioneers* is the political story of the foundation, survival, and progress of Templeton, a "Bildungsroman" of Templeton. This narrative of political growth subsumes the personal survival of Judge Temple, his unique daughter Elizabeth, and that of the communal survival of the white settlers. Judge Temple, we are told, recruited these settlers, in an effort to civilize the wilderness. At a national level, *The Pioneers* can be seen as a romance of national survival, a microcosmic enactment of the establishment, survival, and growth of the nation. This romance of national growth and survival consciously and unconsciously explores such crucial political issues as law, nature, property, marriage, religion, and the relation with the natives.

Fictionally speaking, *The Pioneers* takes place between 1793 and 1794 in Templeton, a newly established white settlement at Lake Otsego. The narrative focuses on the clash between the founder of Templeton Judge Temple and the white romantic hunter Natty Bumppo, who has been living happily in the wilderness befriending, as he has always boasted, its nature and its native inhabitants, yet without giving up his whiteness and civilization

As pointed out by Daryl E Jones, Judge Temple Marmaduke founded Templeton whose survival, consolidation, and progress hinge on the judge's political success in dealing with many threats within and outside it (69). Read from this perspective, one might say, that *The Pioneers* is the political story of the foundation, survival, and progress of Templeton, a "Bildungsroman" of Templeton. This narrative of political growth subsumes the personal survival of Judge Temple, his unique daughter Elizabeth, and that of the communal survival of the white settlers. Judge Temple, we are told, recruited these settlers, in an effort to civilize the wilderness. Unsurprisingly, as demonstrated by several scholars, the conflict between law and nature is one the most, if not the most, central themes of *The Pioneers*. No wonder then it has spilled much ink and engendered a heated debate throughout the years. Although no one can undermine the thematic centrality of this conflict, one might say that by giving it the utmost attention, critics have undermined the more central discursive conflict that has had a tremendous effect on the novel's "cultural work", to use Jane Tompkins' 'sensational' phrase. This conflict is the latent conflict between Judge Temple and Major

Effingham over property and the right both claim over the vast lands of Templeton and its surroundings.

In the context of *The Pioneers*, similar to love and marriage, property is a discourse of national and colonial consolidation, through which Judge Temple subtly legitimizes native expropriation through matching his daughter Elizabeth to the thought-to-be half-breed, Major Effingham's heir Oliver Edwards, who, is an example of Cooper's contribution in fashioning an American gentleman. Through deconstructing the discourse of property, I will try to show, that behind Judge Temple's obsession to acquire more lands, there is, indeed, a latent 'Cooperian' dream, if not a prophecy, of a rising American empire.

In default of a Native American resistance, Templeton is an arena of "interstitiality," to use Homi Bhabha's word, where two colonial gladiators peacefully compromise and agree to share the appropriated land. Property is indeed a very rich site of political, national, and racial negotiations that can help us unveil Cooper's imperialist discourse. The centrality of the discourse of property throughout the romance has encouraged critic Eric Cheyfitz to describe *The Pioneers* as a romance of Property. "*The Pioneers*," states Cheyfitz, "which can define the genre of the traditional western film, is a romance of property" (21). It is worth mentioning, however, that Cooper does not investigate property from a legal or philosophical perspective. Indeed, as convincingly argued by Mary Junqueira and others, what politically interests Cooper is the legitimization of white appropriation of native lands.

In the opening chapter of *The Pioneers*, Cooper exhibits particular interest in both the vast lands surrounding Templeton and the female beauty accompanying Judge Temple. The land is the first character that we encounter in *The Pioneers*. It is metaphorically feminized and juxtaposed to the real female character who would be very instrumental in the ensuing conflict over property: Judge Temple's heiress Elizabeth. Three male intruders suddenly interrupt Temple's initial colonial gaze. The buck scene interrupts Temple's initial romantic encounter with the landscape. In display of his patriarchal relationship both to the land and his daughter, Judge Temple shot a bullet towards a roaming buck. Instead of striking the buck, the bullet strikes Oliver Edwards who appears in the scene along with Natty Bumppo and the Indian Chingachgook. wouldn't it have been more dramatically romantic had Judge Temple's bullet struck Natty Bumppo, or even Chingachgook?

Cooper's selective bullet at the deer scene is an evidence of the ubiquitous presence of Cooper's imperial unconscious. It is this bullet that secures Judge Temple's property, consolidates the settlement, and contains the most challenging threat that could have

confiscated him and thwarted his project at Templeton. It is taming “the lion” in that apparently half-breed Indian that represents the main political agenda of Judge Temple. This hinges on, transporting him from the locus of nature to the locus of culture and law through romance and love. Cooper, by selecting the seemingly half-breed Indian, who would turn out to be Young Edward Effingham, momentarily serves the romantic motif and ultimately serves his political unconscious.

Cooper’s obsession with legitimizing Judge Temple’s property has encouraged him to intrude into the narrative and interrupt the natural flow of the romantic plot. This intrusion becomes a very awkward and direct historical discourse that praises Judge Temple’s nationalistic history over that of his lost royalist friend Major Effingham. Cooper writes:

Educated in the most dependent loyalty, Mr. Effingham had, from the commencement of the disputes between the colonists and the crown, warmly maintained, what he believed to be, the just prerogatives of his prince; while on the other hand, the clear head and independent mind of Temple had induced him to espouse the cause of the people (35).

Because of his loyalty to the American Revolution, Judge Temple found himself the owner of vast lands that his old Royalist friend entrusted to him prior to the War of Independence.

Cooper never questions the legitimacy of Temple’s property. He does not see any moral or legal problem in what Temple did with his best friend. On the other hand, he tries his best to depict Judge Temple as an innocent and legal owner. According to Cooper, prior to the War of Independence, Major Effingham, willingly, “transmitted to Marmaduke for safekeeping all his valuable effects and papers” (36). When the war ended with the victory of the colonists, the new government confiscated all the Royalists. Judge Temple, therefore, found himself the ‘legal’ owner of Templeton and its surroundings:

While, however, he discharged his function with credit and fidelity, Marmaduke never seemed to lose sight of his own interest; for when the estates of the adherent of the crown fell under the hammers of the acts of confiscation, he appeared in New York, and became the purchaser of extensive possessions, at comparatively low prices (36).

It seems axiomatic that Judge Temple purchased the lands with the money Major Effingham confided to him.

Oliver Edwards’s appearance, therefore, appears to negotiate the issue of his grandfather’s property. This makes sense particularly if we remember that Oliver Edwards comes up with Natty Bumppo, who reveals at the end of the romance that he was one of

Major Effingham's old faithful servants (441). This makes readers expect a conflict between Oliver Edwards and Judge Temple over the ownership of Templeton and its surrounding. This, however, never happens. Cooper succeeds in repressing such a conflict that could conjure up the old conflict royalists and colonists. Through a *Deus ex machina*—the unexpected reappearance of Major Effingham who endorsed the marriage between Judge Temple's daughter to his unique heir Oliver Edwards—Cooper reconciles between royalists and Republicans in his envisioning of an America that can forget the agony of the past. To repress this conflict, Cooper successfully confines young Oliver Edwards in the cloak of the romantic lover, who is always ready and willing to give up everything for the sake of a union with his beloved. In the seventh chapter, for instance, after being injured and deported to Judge Temple's mansion, Oliver Edwards firmly and angrily demands a compensation for the deer that Judge Temple believed he shot at the opening scene: "In the morning, then," says Oliver, "I will return and see Judge Temple, and I will accept his offer of the sleigh in token of amity" (92). This tone of challenge surprises Judge Temple, who seems to wonder about the source of Edwards' enmity to him. Temple says: "It is strange that one so young should harbor such feelings of resentment" (92). Temple's surprise does not convince us that he was doubtful, if not sure, of Oliver Edwards' real identity.

Cooper diverts his narrative to deal with the origin of the settlers, thus, violating, for another time, the natural flow of the plot. Through this diversion, Cooper provides Judge Temple with enough time so Temple can think of a subtle way to contain the threat of Young Oliver. Soon after this incident, Judge Temple informs his daughter that he would offer Oliver Edwards "a residence within these walls for life" (111). This confession foreshadows the marriage between Elizabeth and Oliver Edwards that would settle all the threatening conflicts in Templeton. "The marriage plot belongs to Temple more than to the happy couple," Richard Godden writes; "Arguably, he knew who Edwards was almost from the beginning, and, therefore, has a direct interest in promoting a union that will protect the integrity of his lands" (135). Richard Godden's point of view is approved by critic Eric Cheyfitz, who argues that, by changing the identity of Oliver Edwards from a threatening enemy into a son in law, Judge Temple gains ultimate control over the land (125).

Interestingly enough, through love, Judge Temple tames the wild in Oliver Edwards, who, through his return to culture, regains not only his lost identity, but also his whiteness and his civilization. This dramatic change stuns readers, as it does Natty Bumppo, who seems incapable of understanding what has happened to his young companion. In the pigeon

scene, Natty Bumppo verbalizes this feeling: “there is Mr. Oliver, as bad as the rest of them, firing into the flocks as if he was shooting down nothing but Mingo warrior” (246). After taming Oliver Edwards, Judge Temple does not find any problem in negotiating the problem of land ownership with him. When sympathizing with his old tutor, whom Judge Temple indicted of law violation, Oliver Edwards alludes to his rights in a scene on which Cooper comments by showing the importance of the discussion between the two men. Cooper’s phrase: “The volcano burst its boundaries”(345), strongly translates the delicacy of any possible conflict between the two men. What is latent in this repressed conflict is that Oliver Edwards, according to Judge Temple and Cooper, cannot claim any property as long as he still claims Indian blood. Neither Judge Temple nor Cooper is ready to discuss any Indian claim of land ownership. “I have heard young man that thou claimest descent from the natives,” says Judge Temple, “These lands are mine by the very grants of thy ancestry if thou art so descended” (345). Cooper, here, makes a very direct political message: the white appropriation of the lands is legitimate by the very virtue of being approved by the natives themselves. Judge Temple and Cooper’s obsession with land ownership translates the capitalist relentlessness to acquire more sources of production not only within the literal boundaries of Templeton but also within the metaphorical boundaries of China.

The capitalist deeds of appropriation, one may venture to say, hides beneath it an Oriental dream of an American empire. Interestingly, if viewed from the critical lens of Edward Said, *The Pioneers* can be perceived as an orientalist or/and an imperialist text. Said’s reference to Cooper in *Culture and Imperialism* is not random in my view. “There is also a dense body of American writing, contemporary with this British and French work,” Said tells us, “which shows a peculiarly imperial cast, even though paradoxically its ferocious anti-colonialism, directed at the Old World, is central to it. One thinks, for example, of the puritan “errand into the wilderness” and later that extraordinarily obsessive concern in Cooper, Twain, Melville, and others (63).¹⁰

Among the twenty-four chapters that make *The Pioneers*, the sugar plantation scene and the mine scene clearly translate the imperialist unconscious of Cooper’s romance. These two scenes reveal how powerful is the ‘Cooperian’ romance in narrating not only a politically and racially harmonious nation, but also a capitalistically imperialist nation that dreams of creating markets everywhere in the globe. Again, it is Richard Jones, who reminds Judge

¹⁰ See Anna Krauthammer, *The Representation of the Savage in James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

Temple of the enormous benefit of introducing industry and technology in the sugar plantation that their obsequious agent Billy Kirby is managing. During their visit to the sugar plantation, Richard Jones deplors the lack of modern technology in the work of Judge Temple's tenants:

"This is your true sugar weather, 'duke,'" he cried; 'a frosty night, and a sunshiny day. I warrant me that the sap runs like a mill-tail up the maples, this warm morning. It is a pity Judge that you do not introduce a little more science into the manufactory of sugar among your tenants. It might be done, sir, without knowing as much as Dr. Franklin—it might be done, Judge Temple (221).

Richard Jones' judicious suggestion reveals an imperialist awareness of the need and benefit of exploiting the vast natural resources that natives could not exploit due to their technological "backwardness". Technological superiority, as understood by Richard Jones, was, according to historian James Axtell, one of the most significant elements of white superiority in the history of the colonial encounters in North America. "The second more important course of the white man's power in native America was his technological superiority", Axtell notes, "In a very short time, the enterprising newcomers discovered how to turn the natives awe of European technology to private advantage" (57).

Richard Jones's dream of technologizing the sugar industry is just a starting point for what might be seen from a postcolonial lens as the romance's imperialistic discourse: replacing the traditional imperialist powers of the world, Britain and France, and taking over their domination of international trade. It is, however, through undermining the awkward irony and accepting the literal meaning in Elizabeth's reply to her cousin's vision that we can uncover Cooper's dream of an American domination of world trade:

And purchase the cargo of one of those ships that, they say, are going to China," cried Elizabeth; "turn your potash-kettles into tea-cups, the scows on the lake into saucers; bake your cake in yonder lime-kiln, and invite the country to a tea party. How wonderful are the projects of genius! Really, sir, the world is of opinion that Judge temple has tried the experiment fairly, though he did not cause his loaves to be cast in moulds of the magnitude that would suit your magnificent conceptions (223).

As a woman, Elizabeth is stereotypically portrayed as too shallow to understand the dream of an American empire.¹¹ Cooper, it is to be noted, has always been confident in the power

¹¹ For feminist readings of Cooper, see Nina Baym, "The Women of Cooper's Leatherstocking

of white man's technology and its paramount role in transforming the American wilderness and exploiting its natural resources. In the opening scene, the encounter between the white man's machine and the native nature augurs well for ultimate victory of the white man's technology: the sleigh, as a sophisticated white man's machine, triumphantly crosses the thaw, thus foreshadowing the indispensable role the white man's machine would play in taming the native wilderness and conquering the world. This scene clearly translates Cooper's projection of an industrial republic and not an agrarian republic as postulated by Brook Thomas, who claims that Cooper's "vision of the ideal republic remained agrarian" (93).

Richard Jones's dream of technologizing the sugar plantation is strongly approved by the capitalist Judge Temple who even predicts a change in the balance of imperialist power when he dreams of a new world system led by the United States of America after the decline of Britain and France. According to the expectations of Judge Temple, America will build up its empire on the ruins of the two traditional empires: "Thou reasonest with judgment, William," returned Marmaduke. "So long as the old world is to be convulsed with wars, so long will the harvest of America will continue" (229). Cooper, here, is both prophetic and aware of the concept known as "the movement of empires." The analogy that Cooper makes between Templeton, a microcosm of the rising empire, and Rome is culturally pregnant with Cooper's dreams of the American empire. Cooper writes:

"Why, there is judgment in all things," said Kirby, stirring the liquor in his kettle briskly. "There's something when and how much to stir the pot. It's a thing that must be learnt. Rome wasn't built in a day, nor, for that matter, Temple-town 'ither, though it may be said to be a quick-growing place" (226).

In its building of an empire, the United States of America, as Cooper theorizes, needs power and patience as it needs the imperial expertise of its settlers who used to be British and French colonists. This is the case, for instance, with the French settler Mr. Le Quoi, who, as implicitly stated by Richard Jones, will be of great benefit in improving the sugar plantations in Templeton: "Here is Mr. Le Quoi, he has been in the West-Indies, and has seen sugar

Tales." *American Quarterly* 23 (1971): 696-709 and Anne L. Bower, "Resisting Women: 'Feminist' Students and Cooper's *The Pioneers*, with a few Thoughts Concerning Pedagogical Approaches to *The Prairie*," in *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art, Papers from the 2001 Cooper Seminar* (No. 13), The State University of New York College at Oneonta, 2001.

made. Let him give an account of how it is made there, and you will hear the philosophy of the thing" (222).

Sugar, along with tea, coffee, and spices, according to postcolonial theory, is one of the most imperialist commodities that stimulated western colonial enterprise. By invoking sugar industry and the wall of China, *The Pioneers* transforms the domestic conflict over property to an allegory of an American empire that has the superlative technological and capitalist capacities. With such technology and capitalism, Cooper prophesied that America will indubitably be capable of both monopolizing global trade and supplanting the declining British and French empires. As such, it is worthy of note that the American empire needs both inside territorial expansion and outside maritime ambitions. This latter, according to Martin Green, was hailed by Cooper as America's most vital manifest destiny (162).

Fascinatingly, in his political essay *Notions of the Americans*, Cooper makes it clear that the American empire will not only be the fruit of the westward expansion, but also the result of gazing beyond the ocean. "The tide of emigration, which has so long been flowing westward, must have its reflux", he prophetically asserted, "The great outlet of the rest of the world, the path of adventure, and the only, at least the principle, theatre for military achievement open to the people of this country is on the ocean"(73). Remarkably, when it comes to the idea of an American empire, Cooper exhibited a prophetic vision that modern history can do nothing but recognize. Judge Temple's desire for more land property, Edward Said would have alerted us, can only expose a Cooperian dream of an American empire that would one day monopolize the wealth of the globe.

If certain modern readers cannot appreciate the literary art of Cooper due to an alleged unreadability, they should be gently reminded of his colossal contribution to the establishment and development of an initially post-colonial but ultimately imperial American mind. For all the obvious historicist (old and new) reasons, Cooper should be treasured outside the stifling artistic horizons of Mark Twain's *Cooper's Literary Offences*. Even if Cooper's texts are allegedly *delirium tremens*, modern readers should join me—a post-colonial and global student of world texts and contexts—in disregarding Twain's claims that "Cooper has scored 114 offenses against literary art out of a possible 115" (4). My present Cooper's defenses should therefore be seen as an international homage to James Fennimore Cooper from a North African 'Moor' whose *Ibn Battutian* global scholarly journey from the South of the Mediterranean to the American Midwest was, Twain would not believe it, triggered by the 'unreadable' Cooper some twenty years ago.

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