JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S GLEANINGS IN EUROPE: ENGLAND: A PRESCRIPTION FOR NATIONAL CHARACTER

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PREFACE

This study focuses upon James Fenimore Cooper's Gleanings in Europe: England, a travel book describing his residence in England. Despite the recent critical attention focused on the novels of Cooper, this work remains neglected or relegated to brief, perfunctory, and incomplete analysis. However, this richly descriptive and analytical account of landscapes, manners, social arenas, and unfamiliar governments reveals some of the dominant concerns of Cooper's social criticism and aggressive patriotism. The purpose of this study, then, is to demonstrate the ways in which Cooper reveals his own individual prescription for the future growth of a rapidly expanding America.

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smile makes us all feel glad.

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James Fenimore Cooper's Gleanings in Europe: England, an expansive interpretation of the author's physical and intellectual journey through the maze-like corridors of English society, is a powerful work of liberation, a testiment to the potential of the New Republic rather than a respectful account of his residence in England. In short, Cooper describes an England that America must never become. The work is composed of twenty-eight fictitious letters addressed to real figures and provides a comprehensive statement of Cooper's democratic belief, a vigorous rejection of a fraudulent parliamentary structure, and a prescription for the future growth of American society. For Cooper, the unity of national character could only be achieved if Americans were prepared to emancipate themselves from English thought; consequently, he sought to illuminate the integrity of the New World against the prejudice and contempt of the decaying Old World. In his Leatherstocking Tales, the American interior became a metaphor for future growth, stressing moral vision, individual freedom and economic prosperity, but in Gleanings in Europe: England, the hope of a new and truly democratic society emerges from Cooper's rejection of English superiority.

In terms of structure, Cooper adopts a thematic pattern that imitates the unguided meanderings of a critical tourist investigating each minute aspect of a foreign country:

themes and sights are introduced, re-introduced, expanded, and dismissed, as Cooper weaves a complete and unified tapestry of England and English life. Furthermore, Cooper's use of the epistolary form allows him the opportunity to vary his critical tone and to establish a stronger sense of authority and verisimilitude. However, the reader quickly becomes aware that the subject of the book, unlike other travel books, is America and not England.

Robert E. Spiller was one of the first critics to document the importance of America's initial relationship with England. Analyzing the surviving documents of the early official representatives to England--an impressive list of prominent Americans including Jefferson, James Maury, Samuel Williams, and John Quincy Adams--Spiller reveals the development and promotion of a nationalist sensitivity:

> The criticism of England afforded by this group of envoys, the majority of them the best American minds of the time, can not, in spite of this fact, be said to add a chapter to American literature, but, when patched together, the result is a picture of the English court of the day and a revelation of the development of the American national character which would be hard to equal.[1]

Initially, these envoys encountered the contempt of an aristocratic court, struggling to maintain power; in the face of false diplomacy, their major effort was to gain recognition

of national existence abroad and at home. As Merle Curti has suggested, the British attack on America only strengthened the call for nationalism, and Russell Blaine Nye's concise summary of this dialogue between nations highlights the importance of the work of a writer like Cooper:

> Consistent (and sometimes savage) attacks on the new United States by British and continental critics forced Americans to defend themselves, their right to exist as a nation, and their future way of life. They found it necessary to answer the question "What is an American?" time and time again. In their attempts to fashion answers, they were forced to study, analyze, and explain--to themselves as well as to their critics--exactly what the American nation was and hoped to be.[2]

In his work, Cooper vividly demonstrates this dominant strategy: he defines the worth and meaning of the American national character by exposing the corruption of the English. As Perry Miller asserts, "In the first half of the nineteenth century many of our best minds went hard to work to prove that we too are a nation in some deeper sense than mere wilfulness."[3] This rejection of European ideals, harnessed to an emerging society slowly accepting its own uniqueness and subscribing to the notion of a shared identity, significantly enhanced America's ability to develop cultural and political models independent of Europe,

especially England.[4] America's relationship with England, then, became a central ingredient to national character, and Cooper's Gleanings in Europe: England reveals the themes that were to remain dominant in this context of emancipation and national development.

But Arvid Shulenberger dismissed Cooper's Gleanings books by saying that "almost all his work of the period can be viewed as an unfortunate divagation from his major career as a novelist."[5] James Grossman supports this thesis by suggesting that Cooper's method of composition and control of structure in these travel books reveals an uncritical and careless attitude towards his subject: "Cooper seems to have thrown his travel notes together somewhat hastily, to have revised some carelessly so that speaking from a given moment of time they describe future events, to have left others uncorrected so that they are contradicted later in the text, and to have published the five books without logical sequence."[6] Both Warren S. Walker and John P. McWilliams, Jr., raised the importance of Cooper's experience in England, but in overlooking Cooper's dense analysis of this experience they prefer to discuss Notions of the Americans and Excursions in Italy.[7] Contemporary reviews of the book in both England and America were mixed. The Spectator stated that the book was "unquestionably the most searching and thoughtful, not to say philosophical, of any which have been published by an American on England"; the Examiner also recommended the book and praised Cooper for being "an

acute observer."[8] John Wilson Croker, writing in the October issue of Quarterly, however, angrily denounces the work, concluding that Cooper's observation of English life is an "autobiography of excoriated vanity";[9] Gentleman's Magazine follows a similar critical method and attacks Cooper's personality in order to dismiss the work: "Mr. Cooper has turned his European tour to profitable account; and has shown his proficiency in the vice of book making, by manufacturing his trip into several volumes of questionable merit."[10]

However, Dorothy Waples in her exhaustive study of Cooper's political philosophy accurately identifies the importance of the work and Cooper's major thematic conclusion: "But Gleanings in Europe: England was different from the other books of travel. It was not really a book of travel at all, but a comparison of the social and political institutions of the two nations, with the conscious aim of showing Americans the evils of imitation."[11] This conclusion--a reflection of Cooper's continual frustration at the dependence of American thought on English concepts and ideals--allows Spiller to identify the aggressive tone of Cooper's analysis: "His years abroad were dedicated to the defense of American principles and the American character against European, but particularly English, criticism."[12] But even these brief critical insights, although valuable, fail to establish a clearer understanding of Gleanings: England.

By tracing the development of each thematic issue,

however, the duality of Cooper's major concern becomes evident: first, Cooper demands that each aspect of English society be examined in order to deconstruct and analyse hidden value systems and beliefs; and second, that when equipped with this critique, an expanding American society might produce its own unique sense of identity and national values, instead of importing the corrupt and diseased ideology of a prejudiced and capricious imperialist power. Gleanings: England then is a work of liberation, an urgent and forceful call for "mental emancipation." If the collective meaning of the Leatherstocking Tales reveals Cooper's vigorous support for social growth and his unyielding hope for the future, Gleanings: England demonstrates how this independent growth can be achieved.

Rejecting the traditional structure and descriptive tendency of most travel books, Cooper attempts to discover what real political values are hidden behind the handsome and ordered stone facade of the House of Commons and to detail the unprovoked and prejudiced opinions that exist under the surface of regimented and impenetrable aristocratic social order. Cooper resists the temptation to construct an endless series of "word paintings"; nevertheless, he does present a complete view of England's sights and manners. Cooper achieves this dense portrait by investigating a small core of recurring subjects: the seemingly ordered and unified vision of the landscape and architecture; the aristocracy and its bustling social arena; the corrupt

parliamentary system and the abuse of power; the nation's contempt for America and her institutions; and the impoverished and repressed state of the working class. Each letter develops one or more of these concerns, but as the work progresses, Cooper's analysis becomes more precise and his own theories for American social growth independent of England emerge more clearly.

In the first letter of the book, addressed to Captain W. Branford Shubrick, Cooper quickly identifies the dominant image of the rural landscape as one "which owes its beauty to its finish, and a certain air of rural snugness and comfort."[13] Furthermore, on climbing a hill overlooking the rich arable land of Dover, the author reinforces this sense of comfort and security:

> The absence of wood would have left a sense of nakedness and sterility, but for the depth of the verdure. As it was, however, the whole district, visible from the heights, had a sort of Sunday air, like that of a comfortable mechanic, who has just shaved and attired for the day of rest. (I, pp. 10-11)

Although this description reflects the simplicity and fertility of the English family lands, Cooper also identifies the underlying social significance of this scene: the rural landscape reveals the unshakeable, ordered, and arrogant sense of security and well-being that pervades all aspects of

English society. In his next letter to Captain Shubrick (II), Cooper's description of Mrs. Wright's London hotel develops this image of national order: "One of the merits of England is the perfect order in which everything is kept, and the perfect method with which every thing is done" (II, p. 19). Although confronted by the impressive architecture of Canterbury Cathedral, Cooper stubbornly refuses to be intimidated by the excessive wealth of tradition and spectacle. As Cooper states, "mere descriptions of such things, are usually very unsatisfactory" (II, p. 17). In order to reveal the hidden social force of the architecture, Cooper, by rejecting description, interprets the cluster of social and political values attached to architectural design and order. For Cooper, the importance of Westminster Abbey lies in "its recollections and its precious memorials of the mighty dead" (IV, p. 34). These established national monuments provide Cooper with an early insight into the social reality of an England caught in the midst of a rapid and confusing transitional era, indicating that the polished veneer of social stability is both illusory and fraudulent: England maintains this illusion and feeling of security by blindly clinging to and promoting past glory. If England was great, that greatness is only dimly alive in the granite castles and marble statues.

Cooper adopts this metaphor of deceptive architectural order in describing Lord Holland's country house in his letter to Mrs. Jay (VI). Like Jane Austen's portrait of

Darcy's manor in Pride and Prejudice, Cooper selects only those details and descriptive elements that emphasize the social order, tradition, and stability that the house reflects:

> The proximity of London and the values of land forbids the idea of a park, but the lawn was ample, and prettily enough arranged. It is scarcely necessary to say that it was neat, in a country where order and system and the fitness of things, seem to form a part of its morals, if not indeed of its religious faith. . . . The rooms were old fashioned, and in some respects quaint. . . . That in which we dined had a ceiling in the style of Elizabeth's reign, being much carved and gilded. (VI, p. 55)

Holland's house represents the aristocratic traditions and assumptions of an older England, an earlier period of orthodoxy and conformity maintained through architectural design and aristrocratic custom. Nevertheless, since the description is for the amusement of Mrs. Jay of New York, Cooper's intimate and respectful tone is more appropriate in discussing the furnishings of the house rather than their social implications.

But in writing to Thomas Floyd-Jones (VII), Cooper reveals his astonishment at the luxurious spectacle of a crowded London street: "I frequently stop and look about

me in wonder, distrusting my eyes, at the exhibition of wealth and luxury that is concentrated in such narrow limits" (VII, p. 68-69). This vivid display of wealth and the seemingly natural order of things, however, provides an ominous warning from the detached pen of the American observer:

> Now, there is a great deal that is deadening and false, in all this, mixed up with something that is beautiful, and much that is convenient. The great mistake is the substitution of the seemly, for the right, and a peculiar advantage is an exemption from confusion and incongruities, which has a more beneficial effect, however, on things than on men. (VII, p. 73)

This aristocratic order and balance attempts to repress and stifle any reform and maintains the power of the ruling class by preserving both the subtle and distinct conditions of class division. Although Cooper recognizes the benefits of this structure for those who occupy the pinnacle of the social pyramid, his democratic concern is for those at the sprawling base.

Writing in A World By Itself: The Pastoral Moment in Cooper's Fiction, H. Daniel Peck asserts that the descriptive technique Cooper utilizes in the majority of his writing is one of imitation and realist representation:

> In such descriptions, nature seems simply to

> present itself as a painting, creating the illusion that the composing eye has done none of the work. The assumption of course is closely related to Cooper's (and the eighteenth century's) view that nature is an orderly system.[14]

But Cooper surpasses this one-dimensional mode of representation in order to stress that the landscape of England promotes social and not natural order--description is replaced by social interpretation. In a later letter to Richard Cooper (XVII), the author, walking through the manicured lawns of a private Royal park, offers his conclusive statement about the dominant character of much of the landscape:

> . . . I knew enough about royal appanages, and the use of royal parks, to understand that the public entered them as a favour, and not as a right; but had it been otherwise, it would have left ground for reflection on the essential difference in principle, that exists between a state of things in which the community received certain privileges as concessions, and that in which power itself is merely a temporary trust, delegated directly and expressly by the body of the people. (XVII, p. 195)

A rural scene allows Cooper the opportunity to offer a comparative interpretation of the English and American political

and social orders: while the landscape of England is one of social exclusivity and oppression, America's vast and open wilderness exhibits the benefits of mass democratic equality.

In another letter to Richard Cooper (XV), the architectural splendor of Windsor Castle crumbles under the gaze of Cooper's aggressive social insight, and even the undulating countryside of this royal estate becomes a target for this analysis: "Whatever may be said of the beauty of the Country in England, in particular parts, it scarcely merits its reputation as a whole" (XV, p. 167). In his earlier descriptions of landscape and architecture (I-XIV), Cooper had sought to illustrate the social chains that suppress equality, but in these later statements, Cooper's purpose is to deconstruct traditional myths about England in order to expose the false dependence of American thought on English prescriptions. The primary target of this social thesis is the impotent power of the King and the sterility of his castle. Ignoring the display of tradition and royal power, Cooper asserts that the castle is an illusory and fraudulent mask disguising an aristocratic rather than royal power structure:

> While it has great discrepancies as a structure, there was a poetical imagery about it, that insensibly led me to see a resemblance between it and institutions of the country; for, like them, it was the pretension of a palace reared on a foundation of feudal usages, aristocratical rather than royal in details, and among which the church

> has managed to thrust itself with great advantage, for the chapel, in magnificence and extent, is, out of all proportion, the finest and most important part of the edifices. (XV, p. 171)

An observation that allows Cooper to conclude that "the edifices occupied by the family were scarcely better than a first-rate Paris hotel, if indeed any better" (XV, p. 174). Therefore, this criticism exposes the corrupt influence of English thought on American ideas and institutions: by cataloguing the corrupt perversions and abuse of power, Cooper demands an end to the acceptance of diseased and cancerous values.

In his concluding statements about the rural landscape and inflated reputation of national architecture in letters XVII and XX, Cooper deflates the mystery of both the river Thames--England's historical and economic artery--and the Tower of London--a pervasive fortress to the dominance of royal heredity and power. He finds the Thames "both a pretty and an ugly stream" (XVII, p. 189), and dismisses the Tower as "dingy" (XX, p. 223). Cooper's descriptive passages are both selective and insightful; unlike the impressionable tourist, Cooper carefully peels away the surface ornament, revealing decay and repression as the dominant characteristics of English life. These scattered impressions, however, are not the major focus of Cooper's thematic concerns, and as the curious traveller finds himself in the

midst of England's aristocratic social arena, he offers an extended analysis of the people, manners, attitudes, and customs that shape this seemingly impenetrable world of nobility, tradition, and grace. Although Cooper reserves his piercing social criticism for a later discussion of England's parliamentary system, his investigation of England's refined social elite forcefully serves his overall theme of exposure and liberation.

In his introduction to his 1930 edition of Gleanings in Europe: England, Spiller stresses the importance of Cooper's London residence in St. James's Place: "The area between this last and Pall Mall, of which St. James's Square and St. James's Place contained the finest residences was and had been for many years an important center for the intellectual element of London's select circles."[15] Therefore, Cooper had only to watch from his drawing room window in order to observe the very heart of England's exclusive social groups. Although Cooper does insert some lively but flattering sketches of friendly nobles and articulate speakers, his chief thematic plan is to detail the confusing tentacle-like aspects of an exculsive class that wields enormous social and political power.

His intimate letter to Richard Cooper (IV) describing his initial contact with this select group acts as a general introduction to the social analysis that Cooper will continue to develop in his observations of this restrictive class. Cooper begins by asserting that the group moves under

severe "restraint," and that it produces petty and "irritating social ambition" (V, p. 45). As Thomas R. Lounsbury has suggested, Cooper thought both the English and American social climates inferior to the natural refinement of French society:

> The polish, the grace, the elegance, and the wit of French social life made upon him an impression which he not only never forgot, but which he was afterwards in the habit of contrasting with the social life of England and America, to the manifest disadvantage of both, and with the certain result of provoking the hostility of each.[16]

Cooper rejects both the "poverty of grace" he experienced at Windsor Castle and the awkward and obvious posturings of an inferior social class. Repeating the analysis of a contemporary writer, Cooper adopts a familiar metaphor in order to indicate the constant frenzy of social maneuvering: "A looker-on here, had described the social condition of England to be that of a crowd ascending a ladder, in which every one is tugging at the skirts of the person above, while he puts his foot on the neck of him beneath" (V, p. 46). Cooper is both amazed and angered at the Machiavellian strategies of those who occupy the top rungs of the ladder and the way in which they invite or exclude members from their select company.

Attempting to expose these coarse motives, Cooper seeks to infiltrate the respectable outward layers of this enclosed

group. One of the major ways in which the elite maintain order is to continually define the correct mode of dress, social intercourse, and public behavior: "It [propriety] pervades society, from its summit to its base, essentially affecting appearances when it affects nothing else. It enters into the religion, morals, politics, the dwelling, the dress, the equipages, the habits, and one may say all the opinions of the nation" (VII, pp. 71-72). Cooper presents the portrait of an impotent and static society, a society where morals and values are sold in exchange for political favors and meaningless titles. In penetrating this outward appearance, Cooper warns the American reader of the dangers of imitation: "The fact is, the seemliness of England, its studied and calculated decencies, often deceive near observers, and it is no wonder that ardent admirers, at a distance, should be misled by so specious an outside" (XI, p. 118). Similar in conclusion to his attitude concerning England's physical environment, Cooper's intention is to reveal the empty and sterile shell inside this respected and imitated elite.

Dissecting each dominant action and value of this tangled social web, Cooper constructs a series of revelations that tear down this veil of "seemliness." Always blinded by the array of dukes, earls, and lords, Cooper quickly re-educates the short-sighted American: "With the exception of Bath, the orders of this country are commonly conferred on personal favourites, or are the price of political

friendship" (IX, p. 99). In this conversational and matter-of-fact tone, Cooper economically exposes the corrupt system of patronage and selling of political ideals. Furthermore, in a surprisingly harsh and angry letter to Mrs. Comstock (XVI), Cooper analyzes the results of this incestuous exclusion--"English exclusion is a wheel within a wheel; it is a capricious and arbitrary selection" (XVI, p. 177)--and concludes that "the extreme exclusion of the English, is a diseased excrescene; a sort of proud flesh, that has shot up in a moral atmosphere" (XVI, p. 178). As a consequence of this exclusion, an ever-widening gulf exists between the lower and upper classes:

> All power that is not based on the mass, must repress the energies and moral improvement of that means for its own security, and the fruits are the vast chasm which exists everywhere, in Europe between the extremes of society. (XXI, p. 244)

A second result of this capricious manipulation of the lower class is the creation of a degrading set of moral values:

> A principal benefit is the superior elevation and training that are imparted to those, who, under other systems, would be kept always in a condition of dependent degradation, and one of its principal disadvantages is the constant moral fermentation,

> that so sensibly impairs the charm and nature of the English circles. (V, p. 46)

Once elevated to the summit of the social pyramid, however, the fortunate individual must adopt the moral stance of the dominant group. Cooper, identifying this process of adoption as social "drilling," lists the defective results of this forced education:

> . . . the substitution of artificial for the natural links of society, form for feeling, and the inward jestering of the mind, which, sooner or later, will be certain to break out on the surface, and disfigure, if it do not destroy, the body politic. (XXI, p. 237)

As Cooper indicates, the cost of maintaining this social order is high: it robs the individual of freedom of thought and imprisons the outsider to a diet of degradation and abuse. By sustaining this gulf of inequality, the aristocracy become indifferent to the feelings of others, or as Cooper suggests, emerges as a "dark spot on the national manners of England" (XIX, p. 216). Having identified each corrupt part of the diseased whole--the polished outward appearance and cancerous inner reality, the vigorous method of exclusion, the selling and buying of rank and titles, the prejudices of an exclusive social orientation, and the aggressive contempt of other class--Cooper has completely

destroyed the traditional assumptions about the condition of England's social elite in an attempt to force the American reader to distance himself from English influence.

His final conclusions dismantle the once impenetrable social structure even further, and his social criticism serves as a warning to those in America who wish to imitate the English social order. Firm in his belief in the equality and honesty of the emerging American democracy, Cooper rejects the superiority of the English system: "the rights of an Englishman are little more than franchises, which require no very profound examination to be understood, while those of the American depend on principles that demand study" (XXVII, p. 300). Furthermore, the English aristocratic system breeds social totalitarianism rather than social emancipation: "The immediate tendency of the English system is, to create an extreme deference in all the subordinate classes for their superiors, while that of the American is to run into the opposite feeling" (XXVII, p. 295). Cooper is ceaseless in his attack on England and forceful in his hopeful expectations for American growth and fertility.

Although the book is composed of a series of fictional letters, a real letter written by Cooper to his son, Richard Cooper, while he was in Belgium in 1832 reveals the sincerity of his social ideals:

> Europe is in a very unquiet state. The governments like to crush the spirits of the people,

> and the people begin to see the means of extricating themselves from the grasp of their task-masters. You in America know nothing of the corruption and abuses of this part of the world, and you cry out against vices of government that would be thought perfection here. They are all struggling to imitate us, and no country is so often quoted as authority, now, as our own. Do not fancy yourselves worse than you are because you are not perfect. Remember human frailty forbids perfection, but thank God for being as well off as you find yourselves. Rely on it, in all the essentials of true civilization you are a country in advance of every other country.[17]

Structurally and thematically, Cooper's analysis of the complexity of English society mirrors his earlier interpretation of landscape and architecture. In the initial stages of his analysis, Cooper attempts to describe this crowded social spectacle, but he quickly rejects this mode of objective representation in order to establish the interpretative tone of his social insight and criticism; moreover, having established these social realities, Cooper forces the reader to consider the dangers of imitation. Cooper's final vision of the English aristocracy, then, is of a gaudily painted mask hiding the disease and decay of a festering organ. Cooper's prescription for the new world is to establish a

social order based on the principle of moral and social equality and to reject the unethical and amoral posturings of the Old World.

Despite Cooper's lengthy and complex analysis of the aristocracy however, his observations of the other social groups are minimal; indeed, Cooper only discusses two other distinct social groups: the poor and the rising new-rich class of merchants, bankers, and businessmen. Cooper's earlier observation of the common mass presents a bleak and dismal scene of national life and unrealized expectations:

> Four hours before we were in the region of politeness, vociferation, snatching, fun, and fraud, on the quay of Calais; and now we were in that of quiet, sulkiness, extortion, thank'ees and half crowns, on that of Dover. (I, pp. 7-8)

This description of forced and unremitting resignation offers a chilling contradiction to the traditional, inspirational stereotype of the common Englishman, and Cooper's evident intention is to remove this myth from the American psyche:

> The poor of this country appear to me to be overlooked. They have little or no time for relaxation, and instead of exhibiting that frank manly cheerfulness, and heartiness of feeling, that have been so much extolled, they appear sullen, discontented, and distrustful. (XXV, p. 276)

Living in this "huge theatre of misery and vice" (XXV, p. 278) the people are pawns in the hands of an oppressive aristocracy and self-serving government. Although brief, these short statements reflect the sincerity and compassion of Cooper's social conscience and his belief in the ability of a new world republic to foster social equilibrium.

Cooper's attitude toward the rapid rise of the middle class is both resentful and distrustful. In The Pioneers, it is the middle class who set in motion the destruction of the Edenic wilderness and who are incapable of furnishing the expanding society with a coherent set of moral values. In Gleanings: Europe, this expanding class appears as a silent crowd threatening to engulf the frail links in the hereditary chain of aristocratic power:

> There has arisen, within the last fifty years, a tremendous money-power, that was formerly unknown to the country. Individuals got rich in the last century, where classes get rich now; and instead of absorbing the new men, as was once done, the aristocracy is in danger of being absorbed by them. (XII, pp. 138-139)

The third major thematic component of the work consists of Cooper's numerous investigations of England's attitude toward an independent and expanding America. In the Preface, Cooper asserts England's prejudice towards America and the latter's inability to challenge this constant stream of

misrepresentation and abuse:

> The English do not like Americans. There is a strong disposition in them to exaggerate and circulate anything that has a tendency to throw ridicule and contumely on the national character--and this bias, coupled with the irritation that is a consequence of seeing others indifferent to things for which their own deference is proverbial, has given rise to many silly reports, that affect other besides the writer. On the other hand, so profound is the deference of the American to England, and so sensitive his feelings to her opinion, that he is disposed to overlook that essential law of justice which exacts proof before condemnation. (p. 2)

Determined to correct this flow of misinformation, Cooper's strategy is to expose each incident or personal and national mistreatment so that the reader gain a more accurate understanding of England's attitude to and assessment of America. This fluid and continuous commentary, often comic and sometimes petty, is the principle reason for the critical mauling that the work received in England when first published. Writing in the Quarterly Review, J. G. Lockhart states that Cooper's "ignorance and presumption betray him at every moment into mis-statements so gross, and sometimes so elaborate, as to have all the appearance and effect of absolute

falsehood."[18] Nevertheless, the majority of Cooper's observations are objective and serve a more important purpose than that of heaping ridicule on a crumbling England. Cooper's primary desire is to break America's emotional and historic link to England. Furthermore, the sheer quantity of Cooper's differing examples of unrestrained prejudice reveals an England unworthy of trust and dependence.

As with previous subjects under his observation, Cooper establishes the theme of anti-Americanism in the first few letters. Writing to Richard Cooper (III), the author described his first encounter with a member of England's upper class and his quick realization that his American heritage uncovers an underlying prejudice: "It was not possible to believe that he entertained a favourable opinion of the country, notwithstanding the liberal tendency of his writings, blended with a few shrewd and judicious remarks, peeped out of all his notions" (III, p. 25). Both Cooper's theme and England's attitude are firmly established. Furthermore, these ideas are promptly reinforced two pages later where Cooper, with a resourceful mixture of humor and social insight, narrates a case of mistaken identity:

> I then explained to her that I was confounded with another person, my father being an American, and never out his own country. This news produced an extraordinary change on the countenance and manner of my new acquaintance, who, from that moment, did

> not deign to speak to me, or hardly to look at me! As her first reception had been quite frank and warm, and she herself had sought the introduction, I thought this deportment a little decided. I cannot explain the matter, in any other way, than by supposing that her inherent dislike of America suddenly got the better of her good manners, for the woman could hardly expect that I was to play impostor for her particular amusement. This may seem to you extraordinary, but I have seen many similar and equally strong instances of national antipathy betrayed by these people, since my residence in Europe. I note these things, as matter of curious observation. (III, p. 27)

Alongside this unprovoked and frank hostility, Cooper identifies both the ignorance of England's understanding of American customs and values--an ignorance fueled by the harshly pro-colonist editorials of the English press--and seemingly endless attempts to prove this new republic guilty of a various number of crimes. For Cooper, England's ignorance is the product of the nation's inability to accept the validity of America's victory in the revolutionary war. Clinging to former glories, England stubbornly refuses to recognize the existence of an independent America: "They will not acquire this knowledge, simply because they do not wish to acquire it, until we bear hard on some of their

interests, political or pecuniary, and then light will pour in upon them in a flood, as the sun succeeds the dawn" (VI, p. 59).

However, as a temporary resident within the shores of this former colonial master, Cooper must endure the hostile prejudice; but this firsthand experience allows Cooper the opportunity to successfully expose the dominance of this attitude. Although addressed to Mrs. Jay, this first indication of England's deeply ingrained prejudice towards America is a bold and absolute statement: "It is not easy for an American to imagine the extent of the prejudice which exists against his country in England, without close and long observation" (VI, p. 66). Even in the company of England's social elite, Cooper is surprised at the open display of hostility toward America and is resigned to his own inability to counter effectively this prejudice:

> Surprised to find the depth, and universality of prejudice against America, here, as well as the freedom with which remarks are made, I determined to try the experiment of retorting in kind. In most instances, I have found that they who were willing to talk all night, on the defects of America, become mum, the instant there is an illusion to any similar weaknesses in England, or in English character. (XXI, p. 247)

But if Cooper cannot successfully defeat this prejudice in

England, his close examination of these attitudes and values should alert the American public to the dangers of accepting with consideration the opinions of another country.

After the initial week of his journey into England, Cooper realizes the importance of an independent America: "No people was ever more independent in its facts; would to heave it were equally so in its opinions" (VIII, p. 90). Cooper might be unable to overturn this prejudice, but his belief in the strength and power of the American people suggests a future victory. In order to support this movement, Cooper adopts a familiar structural pattern: after exposing the immediate and external evidence of this prejudice, Cooper identifies both the reasons for this attitude and the specific American targets it attempts to dismiss, and having presented this wealth of observation and analysis, Cooper reveals his prescription for the future behavior of the American people and their institutions. Fueled by ignorance and decaying but persistent colonial maxims, English prejudice is directed at all aspects of America: "The United States, her system, national character, historical fact, people, habits, manners, and morals for obvious reasons, have been one principal object for these assaults" (XIII, pp. 154-155). Loyal to the opening remarks in his preface--to emancipate and make America great--Cooper's final treatment of this theme offers a concluding summary of England's feelings toward America and his vision of an America separate from English values, institutions, and criticism.

Cooper's summary of English opinion, contained in a letter to Richard Cooper (XXIII), stresses the objective and social emphasis of Cooper's writing; the observation does not reveal the injured pride of a victim of personal prejudice, but the dismantling of one nation's attitude towards another's values, traditions, customs, and institutions:

> Such notions is the American condemned to meet with, here, not only daily, but hourly, and without ceasing, if he should mingle with the people. The prejudices of the English, against us, against the land in which we live, against the entire nation, morally, physically, and politically, circulate in their mental systems, like the blood in their veins, until they become as inseparable from the thoughts and feelings, as the fluid of life is indispensable to vitality. (XXII, p. 263)

Cooper reproduces this aggressive and firm tone when revealing his private vision of the future relationship between these two countries:

> When I rejoice in the alienation of the feelings of America from England, it is not that I could wish to see our own nation on worse terms with this, than with any other, but, under the full conviction that we must pass through some such process of alienation, before we shall ever

> get to consider the English in the only mode that is either safe or honourable for one independent people to regard another. (XXVI, p. 286)

This evocative and distinct plea for independence, informing not only the insight and critical perception of this work but also Cooper's fictional work, reflects the essential elements of Cooper's social and political thesis: independent thought, value, and action for America.

A subsidiary theme or critical by-product of Cooper's analysis of England's assessment of America is his exploration of the English press and popular literature. This critical investigation, the product of his desire for both literary and political traditions separate from England's, provides support for Cooper's analysis of English values and politics. All of his observations concerning the press are contained in a letter written to William Jay (XVIII). Central to Cooper's treatment of the press and contemporary English literature is his belief that its power "is wielded to advance the interest of England, and, as a matter of course, to thwart our own" (XVIII, p. 208). The established newspapers support the privileged power structure, reinforce imperialist attitudes towards foreign countries, and manipulate the negative reception of American literature. In the face of this complex network of literary propaganda, Cooper acknowledges the difficulty in overcoming this mistreatment: "Alas! it is much easier to declare war, and gain victories

in the field, and establish a political independence, than to emancipate the mind" (XVIII, p. 206). A victory in 1776 may have formed a politically independent republic, but in Cooper's mind a more complete victory still remains in the future. Cooper inserts this analysis of the press because he realizes the influence of the English literary assault on American opinion: "The English, who control the reviews and journals, are fully aware of the influence they wield over the public mind in America, and you may be quite certain, that a nation, whose very power is the result of combination and method, does not neglect means so obvious to attain its ends" (XVIII, p. 207). Cooper is willing to challenge any exterior force that attempts to mold or shape American thought; he achieves this idealistic challenge in Gleanings in Europe: England by documenting the modes of repression and prescribing the means of freedom and equality.

Cooper's final thematic concern is to explore the major differences between the governments of England and America. By exploring the political and social power structures of the House of Lords and House of Commons, Cooper's strategy is to expose the corrupt abuse of political power in England and, at the same time, to illuminate the principle of equality and liberty on which the American legislative bodies are founded. In his discussion of these differing political systems, Cooper's dominant tone is that of the investigative social critic, demonstrating, as Richard Chase has asserted, that Cooper "wanted to be the spokesman of his country, as

well as its severest critic, and he thought of his novels as public acts."[19] As with previous subjects under Cooper's social gaze, his examination of England's parliamentary system and political power structure goes beyond mere description; broadly speaking, Cooper's analysis is separated into three major categories: the charade of democracy practiced in the House of Commons; the corrupt aristocratic perversion of power in the House of Lords; and the threat of violent revolution unless reform is quickly achieved.

Cooper's visit to the House of Commons provided him with an opportunity to observe closely the workings of England's parliamentary system. Cooper's description of the attitude and behavior of the assembled members of parliament in his letter to William Jay (X) expresses his unfamiliarity with the traditional workings of the English political system and the difficulty in identifying the opposing political parties. However, this first impression also reveals the general tone of indifference and laziness that seems to dominate this elected political body:

> Behind the speaker's chair, two members were stretched at full length, asleep. I presume the benches they occupied were softer than common, for two or three others seemed anxiously watching the blissful moment of their waking, with an evident intention to succeed them. One did arise, and a successor was in his place in less than a minute.

> That I may dispose of this part of the subject, once for all, I will add that, during the evening, three young men came into the side gallery within fifteen feet of me, and stretched themselves on the benches, where they were not visible to those in the body of the house. Two were disposed to sleep, rationally, but one of them kept pulling their coats and legs in a way to render it no easy matter, when all three retired together laughing, as if it were a bad job. I should think neither of the three was five and twenty. (X, pp. 104-105)

Leaving the House, Cooper can only conclude that "no business of importance was done" (X, p. 106). In these brief statements, Cooper has successfully robbed the English parliament of its mysterious traditions and powerful reputation: the American reader witnesses the shabby reality beneath the polished appearance and shares in Cooper's mildly derisive victory. However, by developing this thematic thread in three separate letters to William Jay of Bedford, New York (X, XII, XIII), Cooper offers a much denser analysis of the fraudulent power structure of the House of Commons. Central to his analysis is Cooper's desire to illustrate the corrupt state of the supposed democratic electoral process in England and to reveal to the American reader the superiority of his own political system.

Although the historical context of Cooper's residence

suggests vigorous social reform, his analysis of the political and social associations of the House of Commons reveals a powerful aristocratic power structure determined to maintain its leadership in all aspects of English life. Constructing each letter like an essay, he begins by establishing an assertive thesis: "In point of fact then, the peers of England and the commons of England are merely modifications of the same social castes" (XII, p. 137). Cooper supports this thesis by examining the background of the politicians who sit in the House of Commons; and Cooper's evidence is indeed startling. Cooper states that one hundred and sixty of the present members are sons of peers, but his analysis extends beyond such broad insight. Making a fine distinction between titled and landed aristocracy, Cooper asserts that a political monopoly lies in the hands of the landed aristocrats who dominate both houses:

> But nobility is by no means the test of this government. It is, strictly, a landed, and not a titled aristocracy. There are seventy-four baronets among the commons, and these are usually men of large landed estates. If we take the whole list, we shall not probably find a hundred names that, socially, belong to any other class than that of the aristocracy, strictly so called, or that are not so nearly allied to them in interests, as virtually to make the House of Commons,

> identical, as a social caste, with the House of Lords. It is of little moment whether these bodies are hereditary or elective, so long as both represent the same set of interests. (XII, pp. 137-138)

For Cooper, then, the House of Commons debates empty and meaningless issues; the members adopt the mantle of reformers in public, but consolidate their own aristocratic privileges in private. These elected officials act a role in a complex charade designed to promote the integrity of England's democratic government. But having presented his evidence, Cooper can only conclude that democracy is a commodity rarely seen in England:

> In America, an election ought to be, and in the main it is, an expression of the popular will for great national objects; in England, it is merely a struggle for personal power, between the owners of property. The voter with us, is one of a body which controls the results; in England, he is one of a body controlled by direct personal influence. (XVIII, p. 212)

Having established the theme of political abuse, Cooper maintains the intensity of his social analysis by investigating the mysterious workings of the House of Lords. After only the briefest observation of a debate--Cooper's

descriptive strategy once again dismisses the outward trappings of honored aristocratic tradition in order to reveal the petty and self-serving maneuvers of the conspiritorial peers--Cooper's initial interpretation exposes with precision the reality hidden by regal robes and royal titles:

> The peers of Great Britain, considered as a political body, are usurpers in the worst sense of the word. The authority they wield, and the power by which it is maintained, are the result neither of frank conquest, nor of legally delegated trusts, but of insidious innovations effected under the fraudulent pretences of succoring liberty. (XII, pp. 135-136)

Cooper organizes his evidence in order to suggest that the continued corrupt duplicity of both Houses will only breed violent rebellion. Thematically, then, Cooper uses these interpretative segments in order to support his vision of both America's and England's future.

Sounding like a frustrated socialist prophet, Cooper urgently suggests that "reform must move fast in England, or it will be overtaken by revolution" (VI, p. 59). After witnessing the abuse of power in parliament, however, Cooper is not confident of reform being achieved by the government, and he states that a "denial" of this social policy will "certainly produce convulsions" (XIII, p. 145). The common man cannot contribute to the reform movement because, as

Cooper has illustrated, "parliament represents exclusively not only the rich, in the main, but the landed interest, and is composed, almost entirely, of men taken from the higher classes" (X, p. 109). While indicating the stagnant force of England's political system and raising the violent vision of rebellion, Cooper presents America's government as a model of political integrity and social responsibility:

> In America facts have preceded opinion, and so far from there being a tendency to aid the first by appeals to prejudices, the disposition has been to retard them by comparisons favourable to the old system. The very opposite of this state of things exists in England. Power, in America, has nothing to apprehend from English example, while power, in England, has much to apprehend from the example of America. (XXI, p. 234)

America becomes the new Eden, England the crumbling Old World. In America, the common man is an integral element in the democratic process; in England, the citizen is merely a pawn manipulated by a higher class that perverts equality and enforces repression. Cooper has unlimited expectations for the American workings of true democracy.

In the final two letters of the book (XXVII, XXVIII), Cooper economically ties together all the thematic threads developed in the previous twenty-six letters and presents his final vision of nineteenth-century England. In

Gleanings: England, Cooper has woven a trail of five distinct thematic concerns: his consistent attempt to penetrate the order and unity of England's smug rural landscape and intimidating architecture; to examine aristocratic manners, attitudes, and values; to expose a corrupt and perverse government; to reveal England's prejudiced contempt for American values and institutions; to observe the oppressed poor, rising mercantile class, and powerful press. Each thread contributes to his overall design: by documenting the collapse of England and of English institutions, Cooper demonstrates the worth and ability of an independent America that can move forward in social and political arenas without following the example of England. Leaving England for Rotterdam, Cooper offers his last statement of principles:

> Here, then, we take our leave of England for a time;--England, a country that I could fain like, but whose prejudices and national antipathies throw a chill over my affections; a country that unquestionably stands at the head of civilization in a thousand things, but which singularly exemplifies a truth that we all acknowledge, or how much easier it is to possess great and useful, and even noble qualities, than it is to display those that are attractive and winning--a country that all respect, but few love. (XXVIII, p. 308)

For Cooper, as well as for the reader, Gleanings in Europe: England has been a painful exorcism: Cooper's reflective tone, in discarding this former colonial power, reveals his silent recognition of what this once great nation produced in the fields of art, science, government, and commerce. Cooper accepts, as a work of liberation, these pains in order to promote the growth of an equally great nation.

NOTES

[1] Robert E. Spiller, The American in England During The First Half Century of Independence (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1926), pp. 151-152.

[2] Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought, 3rd ed. (1943; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964); and Russell Blaine Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation 1776-1830 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960), pp. 40-41.

[3] Perry Miller, "The Shaping of the American Character," The New England Quarterly, 28 (1955), 449.

[4] For other studies available on this aspect of nationalism, see Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, The American Spirit: A Study of the Idea of Civilization in the United States (1942; rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1962); Frederic I. Carpenter, American Literature and the Dream (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1955); Hans Kohn, American Nationalism: An Interpretative Essay (1957; rpt. New York: Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1967); Paul C. Nagel, This Sacred Trust: American Nationality 1798-1898 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); and Clinton Rossiter, The American Quest 1790-1860: An Emerging Nation in Search of Identity, Unity, and Modernity (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971).

[5] Arvid Shulenberger, Cooper's Theory of Fiction: His Prefaces and Their Relation to His Novels (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1955), p. 39.

[6] James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper (n.p.: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1949), p. 97.

[7] Warren S. Walker, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1962); John P. McWilliams, Political Justice in a Republic: James Fenimore Cooper's America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 183-184. For other brief references to Gleanings in Europe: England, see Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York: American Book Company, 1948), pp. 117-136; Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction: An Historical and Critical Survey (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1936), p. 53; George Decker, James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1936), pp. 104-112; Donald A. Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1962), pp. 56-73; and Mary E. Phillips, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: John Lane Company, 1912), pp. 135-260.

[8] Rev. of Gleanings in Europe: England, by James Fenimore Cooper, The Spectator, 27 May 1837, p. 493; and rev. of Gleanings in Europe: England, by James Fenimore Cooper, The Examiner, 4 June 1837, p. 356.

[9] John Wilson Croker, rev. of Gleanings in Europe: England, by James Fenimore Cooper, The Quarterly Review, 59 (1837), 341.

[10] Rev. of Gleanings in Europe: England, by James Fenimore Cooper, The Gentleman's Magazine, 1 (1837), 290.

[11] Dorothy Waples, The Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper (n.p.: Archon Books, 1968), p. 163.

[12] Robert E. Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Time (New York: Minton, Balch, & Company, 1931), p. 128.

[13] James Fenimore Cooper, Gleanings in Europe: England (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), pp. 13-14. All subsequent references refer to this edition.

[14] H. Daniel Peck, A World by Itself: The Pastoral Moment in Cooper's Fiction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 34.

[15] Robert E. Spiller, Introd., Gleanings in Europe: England, by James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. vii.

[16] Thomas R. Lounsbury, James Fenimore Cooper (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), p. 69.

[17] James Fenimore Cooper, Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, ed. J. F. Cooper (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), p. 274.

[18] J. G. Lockhart, "Review of Gleanings in Europe: England," in Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage, ed. George Dekker and John P. McWilliams (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 179. Among other studies examining the initial reception of this work, see Donald A. Ringe and Kenneth W. Staggs, Introd., Gleanings in Europe: England, by James Fenimore Cooper (Albany: State University of New

York Press, 1982), pp. xxiv-xxvii; and Waples, pp. 169-175.

[19] Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 47.

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