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Gender Power and Social Class: The Role of Women in James Fenimore Cooper's The Pathfinder, Homeward Bound, Home as Found, and The Ways of the Hour

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Gender Power and Social Class: The Role of Women in James Fenimore Cooper's
The Pathfinder, Homeward Bound, Home as Found, and The Ways of the Hour

by

Chuck Zeitvogel

A thesis submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts November 22, 2004
Gender Power and Social Class: The Role of Women in James Fenimore Cooper’s

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by Charles T. Zeitvogel

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12-7-04
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12-6-04
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Date
Dedicated to four very important people

Kristina – My wife and my soul mate who always believed in me

Camryn – Daddy's little girl who made sure I took time to play

Mom – For reminding me I always wanted to be a teacher

Dad – For teaching me how to be a father and what it takes to be a man

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Gender Power and Social Class: The Role of Women in James Fenimore Cooper’s
The Pathfinder, Homeward Bound, Home as Found, and The Ways of the Hours

Abstract

This thesis deals with the role Cooper’s female characters play in his novels of manners and social class. Though Cooper is best known for his Leatherstocking Tales and other novels of romantic adventure, he was also a critic of American society. Through his novels Cooper clearly illustrated what he believed were the proper gender roles for men and women. He also used his novels to show his frustration about changes in societal order. His writing was his way of coping with America’s shift of power from the landed genteel class to the urban factory owner class.

This thesis incorporates four of Cooper’s lesser studied novels: The Pathfinder, Homeward Bound, Home as Found, and The Ways of the Hours. In each of these novels Cooper uses gender roles and social class to express his views of the ideal American society. The gender roles Cooper establishes are clear. Female characters are only allowed to wield power in small, enclosed spaces, or in life or death situations. Occasionally Cooper may grant female characters more power, but only if they are away from society, in the wilderness for example, or when there is no chance of them usurping power from men. Male characters, on the other hand, control all social spaces and political power.

Although many scholars either attack Cooper’s novels of social criticism, calling them the rants of a bitter man, or ignore them altogether, this is a gross injustice. Cooper was not a bitter man. He was a man living through a time of
social change. Unfortunately he was not ready or able to cope with those changes.

His novels are his attempt to cope with social change as best he could.
Chapter 1
Cooper Studies: Past & Present

The lack of critical scholarship about James Fenimore Cooper's novels of manners and social criticism is not surprising when one considers that three main obstacles/concerns have conspired to make critics either ignore Cooper completely or keep Cooper's most famous novels, The Leatherstocking Tales, in the foreground of any Cooper study. Cooper's other twenty-six novels are all relegated to the background and consequently out of mainstream print in America.

Mark Twain's attack on Cooper may have done more to damage Cooper's legacy as a writer than any other review or critical study. In his famous 1895 essay, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences," Twain tells readers, "Cooper's art has some defects. In one place in Deerslayer, and in the restricted space of two-thirds of a page, Cooper has scored 114 offences against literary art out of a possible 115. It breaks a record" (Twain 59). After dealing with each of the 114 offences Twain sums up his criticism by stating:

Now I feel sure, deep down in my heart, that Cooper wrote about the poorest English that exists in our language, and that the English of Deerslayer is the very worst that even Cooper ever wrote. ...A work of art? It has no order, system, sequence, or result; it has no lifelikeness, no thrill, no stir, no seeming of reality; its characters are confusedly drawn, and by their acts and words they prove that they are not the sort of people the author claims that they are; its humor is
pathetic; its pathos is funny; its conversations are – oh! indescribable;
its love scenes odious; its English a crime against the language.
Counting these out, what is left is Art. I think we must all admit that.

(Twain 70)

Twain’s attack not only caused scholars to largely ignore Cooper as a serious
writer for the next thirty to forty years, it also set the tone for later critics such as D.
H. Lawrence and Leslie Fiedler, both of whom praised Cooper’s work as
noteworthy, yet felt the need to apologize for Cooper’s deficiencies as a writer.
Lawrence’s treatment of Cooper can be described as detached admiration at best.
He notes that there is substance at the heart of the literature, but a reader must dig
through Cooper’s pages of descriptions to find that substance. Leslie Fiedler, who
gave a substantial number of pages to Cooper in his book, Love and Death in the
American Novel, perhaps sums up both men’s opinions of Cooper when he claims:

Most of his books have not survived the fluctuations of his reputation
or the issues which prompted them. His talent for invective and his
moral intelligence were greater than his psychological insight or his
poetic skill…Particularly unreadable are the novels of his later years,
when his invective turned to hysteria and his intelligence was stifled
by his piety…to the reader of his novels his is, except for a handful
of books, a tantalizing, and ultimately disappointing case…Cooper
had, alas all the qualifications for a great American writer except for
the simple ability to write. (180-91)
Another source of critical bias against Cooper’s work comes from his use of sensationalism and clichés throughout The Leatherstocking Tales, the most famous of his novels. Like the female writers of sentimental fiction in the nineteenth century, Cooper is forced into the backseat of American Literature behind such authors as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. According to Henry Nash Smith, these men were to be taken seriously because they were not afraid to “…explore the dark underside of the psyche or to tackle ultimate social and intellectual issues…” (58). Cooper, on the other hand, is considered a historical novelist unworthy of serious study because:

The historical novelists provide many satisfactions and delights: comedy and intrigue, adventure and conflict and suspense. At their best, they are masters of pace, compelling the reader’s breathless commitment to the unfolding action, and masters of illusion, convincing the reader that it terribly matters whether a ninny of a boy and a pale shadow of a girl end up in each other’s arms. (Fiedler 167)

Cooper’s novels apparently do not delve deeply enough into the dark side of mankind’s soul like Melville’s Moby Dick or Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter and they certainly are not anywhere near as deeply philosophical as Emerson’s transcendental writing or Thoreau’s reflections at Walden Pond. Therefore Cooper is only sparingly mentioned throughout F. O. Matthiessen’s American Renaissance, the book that defined American Literature for nearly half a century. Perhaps if
Cooper’s characters suffered more, his place in the American canon would be more secure.

Instead, Cooper and the sentimental novelists of his time, whose work is very similar in nature to most of his novels, are left on the outside looking in because their novels do not have enough of the right type of suffering. Jane Tompkins sums this idea up well: “Twentieth century critics have taught generations of students to equate popularity with debasement, emotionality with ineffectiveness, religiosity with fakery, domesticity with triviality and all of these, implicitly, with womanly inferiority” (123). Tompkins argues vehemently against the stereotypical thinking of this nature, which caused the most popular novelists of the nineteenth century and their work to be left out of the American canon. She argues that, “the sentimental novelists could not have been so phenomenally successful unless their work had met some deeply felt exigencies” (121). In other words, sentimental novels would not have been the best selling novels of their time if they did not offer something meaningful to the people reading them. It is not a coincidence that many of the works to come out of the mid-nineteenth century that dominate critical study and are considered the masterpieces of American Literature were never widely read or appreciated until long after they were published, and in some cases, after the author died.

The final obstacle in the way of Cooper’s novels of manners and social criticism is the temptation to focus on Natty Bumppo, the hero of The Leatherstocking Tales, and the relationships he has with the other male characters in
those novels. Ironically it is Cooper's invention of this sympathetic outlaw living just outside of society's corrupting influence, coupled with his adapting Sir Walter Scott's model for the historical romance into a distinctly American style, that makes it impossible for critics to completely ignore his work. This archetype, begun with Natty Bumppo, became the model for the central characters of Melville, Hawthorne, and even Mark Twain (the greatest Cooper detractor of all), all of whom are considered to be the central figures of the American literary canon.

The problem is that for too long too this area of Cooper's fiction has been overemphasized. In many ways the plots of The Leatherstocking Tales are too sensational to be believed. The exploits of Natty Bumppo are too heroic. His eyesight is too keen, his shot is too true, and his motives are too pure and sincere. Thus, much of the critical bias against Cooper appears to be correct. But it is only correct because of where the focus lies. Contrary to popular belief, there is more to the writing of James Fenimore Cooper than the Leatherstocking Tales and Natty Bumppo. Unfortunately, since these novels and this character are at the center of nearly all Cooper criticism, Cooper's other novels and characters have been pushed aside and ignored for far too long.

The American frontier, while certainly a central backdrop and setting in Cooper's novels, was not his chief concern. Cooper's primary concern was the way in which democracy worked in America. He had an idealized dream for American democracy in which there would still be a place for an upper class. They would not
wield any more political power than anyone else in society because that would be an aristocracy, but they would lead by example.

According to Donald Darnell, “Cooper’s interest in social behavior and manners appropriate to class...is a constant throughout his published works, both fiction and nonfiction” (3). In his book, James Fenimore Cooper Novelist of Manners, one of the only comprehensive studies of Cooper’s novels of manners and social criticism, Darnell argues three main points. “First, Cooper is a serious and often didactic writer who is concerned with manners. Second, the manners theme is central to Cooper’s canon. Third, Cooper’s upper-class characters, often dismissed and their purpose ignored, stand as repositories of value in the republic, and instruct by example and admonition” (ix-x).

Darnell’s examination of this aspect of Cooper’s works and his points of consideration are the perfect springboard for this study which will also focus on Cooper as a novelist of manners and social criticism. My intention, however, is to examine a much smaller selection of novels and to provide a much narrower focus. This study will examine the societal role of female characters in the fiction of James Fenimore Cooper, an area that until recently has been understudied. This is not surprising because, as I’ve already stated, there has been so much focus placed on the male characters. Too often Cooper’s female characters are dismissed as stereotypical damsels in distress who could easily be removed from the narratives. Fiedler, whose study focuses on the bonds between male characters and the homoerotic nature of their relationships, calls them “the scarcely distinguishable
ingénues of Cooper...” (Fiedler 75). D. H. Lawrence paints Eve Effingham, a central character in *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* as a scornful snob:

Well there buzzes Eve Effingham... She is the perfect American heroine, and I’m sure she wore the first smartly tailored suit that ever woman wore. I’m sure she spoke several languages. I’m sure she adored her husband, and spent masses of his money, and divorced him because he did not understand LOVE. (Lawrence 50)

These readings of Cooper’s female characters are grossly unfair because a careful consideration of the female characters and the boundaries placed around them reveals Cooper’s views about American society. In Cooper’s worldview a society only survives when it has a well-ordered and rigid structure. This structure revolves around a patriarchy in which women are not allowed to step outside their boundaries. For them to do so would upset the social order and lead to the moral degradation of society as well as its decay and collapse.

Cooper’s boundaries are very much akin to the closet in sentimental fiction. They set a limited space in which female characters are given power.

All sentimental novels take place, metaphorically and literally, in the ‘closet.’ Sentimental heroines rarely get beyond the confines of a private space – the kitchen, the parlor, the upstairs chamber – but more importantly, most of what they do takes place inside the ‘closet’ of the heart. For what the word *sentimental* really means in this context is that the arena of human action, as in the Tract Society
directions, has been defined not as the world, but as the human soul.

(Tompkins 150-51)

The difference between true sentimental fiction and Cooper’s novels is that the sentimental novelists sought to “…reorganize culture from the woman’s point of view” (Tompkins 124). Cooper sought to maintain these boundaries in order to maintain the laws and customs of the patriarchy.

The three types of boundaries prevalent in Cooper’s fiction are the wilderness, which has no society and thus no social rules, domestic space like the closet, the kitchen or the upstairs chamber, and public spaces like the courthouse or the city in general. All three of these spaces have their own set of rules, especially for women.

While technically not a boundary, the wilderness is an open and dangerous space, unconquered and untainted by society. Since society does not exist in the wilderness, there is no social order to upset. When they are in the wilderness Cooper’s females are given more power and free reign because danger lurks around every corner and behind every bush or tree. The main goal of all inhabitants in the wilderness is survival, not order and structure. As long as there is no patriarchal power for female characters to usurp, Cooper allows them access to social power.

Enclosed, domestic spaces are much more traditional boundaries, but in Cooper’s fiction they act in much the same way the wilderness does. When female characters are defending a small space like a home, or defending their honor or life from within an enclosed space they are granted the power to do so as long as they
remain in that space. Any attempt to move out of that space results in either the immediate loss of power or the destruction (physically, mentally, or spiritually) or the character attempting to move beyond the set boundary.

Public spaces, for Cooper, are strictly the domain of men. They are neither confined enough nor open enough to allow female characters to have power. Public spaces are too much a part of society and therefore social rule. Granting females any power in these places would usurp authority away from the patriarchy and upset the social order. In Cooper’s opinion, as he would express in his novels written after the Married Women’s Property Act of 1849 was passed in New York, the upsetting of the social order meant a loss of authority and ultimately doom for society as a whole. “Both Cooper and (Charles) Brockden Brown were afraid of anarchy and both were afraid of what happens when clear lines of authority, explicit social insignia, and the codes that govern them disappear” (Tompkins 94).

Social insignia or social class is an especially significant topic for Cooper because each of his three boundaries is closely linked with social class, the ultimate boundary in Cooper’s fiction. Like the rigid Hindu caste system, Cooper’s heroines are bound to their social class. Above all else the golden rule for them is to know their place and play by society's rules. Characters who do so are rewarded in the end. Those who step out of bounds or try to change the rules not only suffer themselves, they often cause those around them to suffer as well. This includes any attempt to marry out of a character's own social class. The woman who attempts to move up through marriage is shunned by her new social peers. The woman who
marries beneath her station will not only lead an unhappy and unproductive life, she will also unman her new husband.

In order to examine these boundaries and their significance in Cooper’s fiction I will focus on three main characters, Mabel Dunham from *The Pathfinder*, Eve Effingham from both *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, and Mary Monson from *The Ways of the Hours*. These characters, when studied together, reveal Cooper’s beliefs about social order and the boundaries necessary to keep that order intact.

A close study of Mabel Dunham shows the possible consequences of trying to marry outside of one’s social class, as well as the rewards from avoiding that temptation. A question that needs to be addressed, though, is whether Mabel is allowed to marry the man of her choosing or if the choice has already been made for her because she is in a public space, the British garrison. Through the course of her adventures in the wilderness, Mabel also is granted the power to defend the enclosed space protecting her from the bloodthirsty natives just outside the door. Her safety is only kept in tact within the walls of the blockhouse, though. Any attempt to move outside the safety of this enclosed space would result in either the loss of her life or her maidenly honor when one of the natives made her his squaw.

A study of Eve Effingham shows Cooper’s fascination with the upper class. Eve, her father and her cousin represent the gentry Cooper envisioned to lead their fellow citizens by example. Throughout their journey from Europe in *Homeward Bound* and through their homecoming in *Home as Found* the Effinghams are
presented as the ideal. Any character who either criticizes or questions the Effinghams are perceived as boorish and become the objects of scorn, criticism, and quite often jokes. The Effinghams are the yardstick against whom all the other characters are measured, whether it is aboard the Montauk (another enclosed space) that serves as a microcosm of society in Homeward Bound, or in New York City and later Templeton in Home as Found.

Finally, in Cooper's last novel, The Ways of the Hour, Mary Monson represents the consequences of what happens to a female character who tries to move outside of her boundary and keep the power Cooper granted her while in it. Throughout her trial for arson and a double murder, Mary Monson has seemingly complete control of her fate while she is imprisoned in a jail cell. Once she is acquitted of the crimes, she is expected to relinquish her power because she is no longer in her enclosed space. When Mary tries to spread her views about women's rights in regard to property, marriage and divorce, her power is stripped away and she is pronounced insane. In order to insure that readers realize just how outrageous Mary Monson's views about property and rights for women are, Cooper introduces Anna Updyke to serve as a foil to Mary. Anna represents what Cooper believes to be the proper attitude a woman should have towards her husband's right to his wife's property and wealth.
Chapter 2

Mabel Dunham: The Most Complete Cooper Heroine

When Cooper wrote The Pathfinder in 1840 he took several risks. First, he resurrected Natty Bumppo, his most famous character, after he "had been regularly consigned to his grave, like any living man" (Pathfinder 3). Second, after resurrecting Natty Bumppo, Cooper placed the hunter in unfamiliar territory, an unsuccessful courtship. Third, and perhaps the biggest risk of all, much of the novel does not focus on Natty Bumppo at all. For the first and only time in all of the Leatherstocking Tales most of the emphasis is on a female character rather on the Leatherstocking, Natty Bumppo:

The fortunes of Mabel form the central structure of the book, and throughout the first part Mabel is a heroine of the female-as-handicap type. Though not physically feeble, she must be protected. Later, however, she ceases to become the 'sarjeant's daughter' and emerges in her own right, along with the Indian Dew-in-June. (House, Americans xxii)

Mabel Dunham, the heroine of The Pathfinder, is one of the most complex and complete female characters in all of Cooper's fiction. Unlike many of her predecessors, Mabel is a more polished character, the result of Cooper's more developed craft. Abbey H. P. Werlock sums up this sentiment by stating:

Fortunately, more recent criticism has largely laid to rest these negative views of Cooper's women. In fact, an examination of the
Leatherstocking Tales in order of publication suggests that the women become more complex, more active, and more realistic. Despite their potential of actual positions as victims, a number of young women are spirited, independent, and both morally and physically courageous. (Pathfinder 22)

Mabel Dunham’s life at the military garrison in Oswego, New York and her adventures defending the blockhouse on the frontier make Mabel one of the best examples of how a woman's role changes according to the space she inhabits within a patriarchal society. It is Mabel’s growth as a character from a dutiful daughter to a courageous woman who fends off an Indian attack that makes the story interesting.

As the object of desire for three suitors of three distinct social classes Mabel also illustrates the number one rule for all characters in Cooper's novels: know your place in society. “In the unfolding of the plot Cooper provides a new perspective on his dominant social themes: the sanctity of class lines and the real virtue of those who while aware of their own worth can recognize the superiority of those above them and respect it” (Darnell 53). The rigid hierarchy of the military is the perfect microcosm for Cooper's vision of the ideal society. In the military, each man falls into his place with no ambiguity as to where he belongs. The women, who are dependents of any of these men, the wives, the daughters, etc., fall into the same place as their husband or father does according to the structure of the military. Cooper felt American society should be structured with the same rigidity as the one found in the military. “There are several stances regarding caste or station in the
noveL The military personal and their wives are highly conscious of rank and position. [Major] Lundie is concerned that [Lieutenant] Muir should bring discredit on his caste by forming an unequal alliance” (Rust 3)

Throughout the courtship of Mabel Dunham and the one major social event at the garrison, a target shooting match, the social structure of the Oswego garrison and the consequences of attempting to move within that structure are clearly shown. Although Lieutenant Muir, Natty Bumppo, and Jasper Western all vie for Mabel's hand in marriage, Cooper clearly shows readers that from among these three men there is really only one choice for Mabel Dunham. Because of social rank, Jasper Western is the only one of three who can form a healthy and happy union with her.

In order to understand why Mabel cannot freely choose among these men, the exact nature of the social structure specific to the Oswego garrison must first be established. In the military, as in Cooper’s view of society, a person’s rank dictates his or her actions, as well as his or her role either in the garrison or in society at large. The higher the rank a person holds, the more privileges and responsibilities he has. Cooper's females share the privileges and responsibilities of the men they are attached to by either marriage or family ties. There is also an understanding that just as the soldiers must follow the orders of those with superior rank, so too must the women follow the example of their social betters:

Of females who were officially recognized as belonging to the class of ladies, there were but three in the fort, all of whom were officers’ wives; staid matronly women, with the simplicity of the habits of
middle life, singularly mixed in their deportment, with their notions of professional superiority, the rights and duties of caste and the etiquette of rank. (Pathfinder 155)

These officers' wives are the models for all the others, including Mabel Dunham, to follow and imitate while in the social space of the garrison. Mabel herself resides somewhere in the middle of the garrison's social hierarchy. As the daughter of a sergeant, she is beneath the officers' wives, but above the wives and daughters of the other enlisted men. She must, therefore, be both a leader and a follower at the same time. This puts Mabel in a tough position. She has to set an example for those beneath her socially without appearing too proud. She must not overstep her bounds and venture into the social space presided over by the officers' wives who are considered her betters. "Mabel found one week's residence at Oswego, sufficient to determine her, as to those whom she might be intimate, and those whom she ought to avoid" (Pathfinder 136).

Of course, those to be avoided were those clearly beneath her. If Mabel seemed too intimate with the women of inferior social rank, not only would it hurt her own social life and standing, but it could also have very real and damaging effects on her father's career. With this in mind, it seems logical that if Mabel marries Lieutenant Muir not only will she elevate her own social caste, her father may also eventually receive a commission and become an officer in the Royal Army. Readers even get the impression that such a social move might be possible. "Mabel, who had already been admitted to the society of the officers' wives, on the
footing of a humble companion, was a good deal noticed by the ladies in front, who had a proper appreciation of modest self-respect and gentle refinement, though they were all fully aware of the value of rank, more particularly in a garrison” (Pathfinder 155). The indication Cooper gives is that even though the ladies of the garrison might like and even respect Mabel Dunham, they also know she cannot be their equal because her father is not an officer. The notion that they view Mabel as a humble companion puts her only a step or two above the social position a favorite servant might hold.

The social distance between the officers’ wives and the rest of the women at the garrison is best represented in the description of the shooting match as the women move toward the stage that has been set up in the viewing area:

- Some little preparation had been made for the proper reception of the females… Great care was taken to reserve the front seat of the stage for the three ladies and their children, while Mabel, and those who belonged to the non-commissioned officers of the regiment, occupied the second. The wives and daughters of the privates were huddled together in the rear, some standing and some sitting as they could find room. (Pathfinder 155)

While those of the highest rank are given prime seating with the best view of the contest, those of the lowest rank must take what they can get.

- It is easy and natural to assume that marrying Lieutenant Muir would elevate Mabel to the front row. This, however, is not the case. Cooper does not allow such
a move. Neither money nor marriage can elevate a person in Cooper’s ideal society. Education, breeding and polish determine one’s social position. Since Mabel lacks these essentials, Mabel cannot move into the front row. No matter what rank her husband holds at the garrison, Mabel will always be viewed as inferior. Any attempt on Mabel’s part to become equal would only serve to cause the other wives to harbor a deep resentment towards her.

One need only read further into the shooting match scene to find evidence of this. The contestants in the shooting match do not compete for honor and bragging rights alone. They are competing for several prizes. Among the prizes is a silk calash of great beauty and quality. Immediately after his victory in the shooting contest Jasper Western presents the calash to Mabel Dunham as a token of the high esteem in which he holds her. The officers’ wives immediately question the appropriateness of such a gift falling into Mabel’s hands:

The ladies, however, were not so much engrossed with rifle shooting as to neglect the calash. It passed from hand to hand; the silk was felt, the fashion criticized and the work examined, and divers opinions were privately ventured concerning the fitness of so handsome a thing’s passing into the possession of a non-commissioned officer’s child. (Pathfinder 168)

The attitude of the ladies is obvious. The silk is too good for someone of Mabel’s caste.
In order to further his point, Cooper adds a public display of the scorn they privately bear towards Mabel:

"Perhaps you will be disposed to sell that calash Mabel, when it has been a short time in your possession?" inquired the captain’s lady — "Wear it I should think you never can."

"I may not wear it madam," returned our heroine modestly, "but I should not like to part with it either."

"Remember, if you do determine to dispose of the thing, that it is bespoke, and that I will not take it, if you ever put it on your own head."

"Yes ma’am," said Mabel, in the meekest voice imaginable, though her eyes looked like diamonds and her cheeks reddened to the tints of two roses, as she placed the forbidden garment over her well turned shoulders, where she kept it a minute, as if to try its fitness, and then quietly removed it again. (Pathfinder 168)

The inflexibility exhibited by the Captain’s lady is a mirror of Cooper’s own beliefs about the impossibility of mixing social classes. She will not accept the calash second hand from a woman she feels is her inferior; Cooper will not allow Mabel to marry into a higher social class. Were she to do so, not only would she not be accepted by the other ladies, but she would also rise above her own father. "If I were an officer myself, Mr. Muir might have some chance; but time has placed a door between my child and myself, and I don’t intend there shall be that of a
marquee, also” (Pathfinder 279). In a patriarchal society this cannot happen, lest
power be usurped from he who is supposed to rule. In this case Sergeant Dunham is
the head of Mabel’s family. Thus, Lieutenant Muir can never become Mabel’s
husband. The consequences for all characters concerned are too great.

These consequences do not only exist if Mabel tries to marry above her
station. They exist if she marries a man beneath her social class as well. Just as
Mabel cannot be allowed to marry above her station, it is equally important to keep
her from marrying below her rank even though the union is most desirable to her
father.

The dismissal of Lieutenant Muir as a possible husband for Mabel leaves
two candidates: Natty Bumppo, the Pathfinder, and Jasper Western. Sergeant
Dunham’s choice in the matter is clear. He repeatedly tells Major Duncan that the
Pathfinder will be Mabel’s husband. “Accustomed to command and to obey
without being questioned, or questioning others concerning the reasonableness of
the mandates, he was perhaps too much disposed to believe that his daughter would
marry the man he might select, while he was far from being disposed to do violence
to her wishes” (Pathfinder 133). The thought that Mabel might not accept Natty
Bumppo never enters Sergeant Dunham’s mind.

He goes so far as to discuss the matter with Natty Bumppo before ever
broaching the subject with Mabel:

Without consulting her, Dunham has selected his best friend Natty
Bumppo, twenty years Mabel’s senior, to be her husband. The
institutions of both marriage and the military are presented ironically as the novel progresses: Sergeant Dunham persists in referring to his daughter with military metaphors, particularly with Natty: she is a recruit who should obey orders. (Werlock 32)

When Natty questions Mabel’s willingness to consent to the union Sergeant Dunham dismisses any such fears:

“Do you think the gal will consent to quit all her beloved settlement usages, and her visitin’s, and church-goings to dwell with a plain guide and hunter, up, hereaway in the woods? ‘Will she not in the ind crave her old ways, and a better man?’”

“A better man, Pathfinder would be hard to find,” returned the father. “As for town usages, they are soon forgotten in the freedom of the forest, and Mabel has just spirit enough to dwell on a frontier. I’ve not planned this marriage, my friend, without thinking it over as a general does his campaign.” (Pathfinder 131)

Although in many novels of the early nineteenth century the father’s endorsement would be enough to solidify the union, in Cooper’s novels this is not necessarily the case. If Natty Bumppo were considered the social equal of the Dunham family there would be no problem. But since the Pathfinder, though honored and revered for his skill in the woods and with a rifle, is looked down upon because he is not a soldier, the union cannot work. The respect paid to Natty
Bumppo is for his skills, his honesty, and his character, not for his social position as he has none, and in Cooper’s world social position is everything.

Natty. Bumppo is a simple woodsman with simple wants. Other than a simple cabin and the promise of venison on the table, he has little to offer a beautiful young maiden in the prime of her life. Sergeant Dunham’s brother-in-law, Charles Cap, offers one of the best arguments against the union of Mabel and the Pathfinder:

Well Brother Dunham, every man has his opinions and his manner of viewing things, and to my notion this match will be anything but agreeable to Mabel. I have no objection to the age of the man; I’m not one of them that thinks it is necessary to be a boy to make a girl happy, but on the whole I prefer a man of about fifty for a husband; still there ought not to be any circumstance between the parties to make them unhappy. Circumstances play the devil with matrimony, and I set it down as one, that Pathfinder do’n’t know as much as my niece. You’ve seen but little of the girl, serjeant, and have not got the run of her knowledge; but, let her pay it out freely, as she will do when she gets to be thoroughly acquainted, and you’ll fall in with but few schoolmasters that can keep their luffs in her company.

(Pathfinder 392)

Cap knows this match cannot work because Mabel is smarter than Natty. This discrepancy in education can only undermine Natty’s authority as a husband. It is
similar to the situation Mabel’s marrying an officer would create. She cannot rise above her father socially because it would destroy his authority; she cannot have intellectual superiority over her husband because it would only breed resentment in both parties.

The view Cap expresses is an echo of Mabel’s own rationale for rejecting Natty’s amorous advances. She knows that a union between them could only end in catastrophe no matter how much respect she has for him:

"I do indeed think the better of you, Pathfinder, than of most others – I am not certain that I do not think better of you, than of any other; for your truth, honesty, simplicity, justice and courage are scarcely equaled by any on earth."

"Ah! Mabel!— These are sweet and encouraging words from you, and the Sarjeant, a’terall, was not as near wrong as I feared."

"Nay, Pathfinder – in the name of all that is sacred and just, do not let us misunderstand each other, in a matter of so much importance. While I esteem, respect – nay reverence you, almost as much as I reverence my own dear father, it is impossible that I should ever become your wife… A match like that would be unwise – unnatural perhaps…” (Pathfinder 270-71)

This union would be unwise because Mabel is in love with Jasper Western and "unnatural" because they belong to different social classes. Just as there will be
severe consequences if Mabel marries Lieutenant Muir, there will also be serious consequences if Mabel marries Natty Bumppo.

The consequences for Mabel are very straightforward. She will have to deny her true feelings, something she is later willing to do only when it will fulfill her father's dying wishes: In addition to living the rest of her days with a broken heart, Mabel will also have to forsake society and its privileges and rewards for a life in the wilderness. Although there are many freedoms on the frontier, as will be discussed later in this study, life in the wilderness will be the death of Mabel's intellect. Her daily duties will never be more than cooking Natty's venison, mending his clothes, and perhaps raising his children.

As for Natty Bumppo, the consequences are much more severe for him. His entire world and lifestyle will be destroyed. In his heart, Natty Bumppo is a woodsman, a hunter, a guide, and when needed, a warrior. He is defined by his rifle, Killdeer, and his unmatchable and legendary skill with that rifle. His is a lifestyle that has always excluded any thoughts of love and marriage. The woods have always been his only love. "Here have I journeyed and guided through the woods female after female, and consorted with them in the garrisons, and never have I ever felt an inclination for any, until I saw Mabel Dunham" (Pathfinder 427).

Now that love and marriage have entered into Natty's thoughts, the consequences of those thoughts must be revealed. Cooper elects to show the effect marriage will have on Natty Bumppo through two descriptions Natty gives of his dreams set one hundred and seventy pages apart:
I think no longer of any thing rude in my dreams, but the very last night we staid in the garrison, I imagined I had a cabin in a grove of sugar maples, and at the root of every tree was a Mabel Dunham, while the birds that were among the branches, sung ballads instead of the notes that nature gave, and even the deer stopped to listen. I tried to shoot a fa’an, but Killdeer missed fire, and the creatur’ laughed in my face, as pleasantly as a young girl laughs in her merriment, and then it bounded away, looking back, as if expecting me to follow.

(Pathfinder 275-76)

Killdeer has never missed fire up to this point. It is the Pathfinder’s thoughts of love and marriage that cause the unthinkable to happen.

Later in the novel, after Mabel gives her consent to become Natty Bumppo’s wife, a reward for saving her life, and her father’s dying wish, Cooper writes a similar dream sequence

Now, instead of sleeping, as sound as natur’ at midnight, as I used to could, I dream nightly of Mabel Dunham. The young does sport before me, and when I raise Killdeer, in order to take a little venison, the animals look back, and it seems as if they all had Mabel’s sweet countenance, laughing in my face and looking as if they said, ‘Shoot me, if you dare! (Pathfinder 445)

The symbolic nature of the dream is obvious. Natty must make a choice. He either has to give up the only lifestyle he has ever known, or he must kill the
feelings he has for Mabel.' His love of the woods and his love for Mabel cannot realistically co-exist. Giving up his life in the woods is not a real option for a man like Natty Bumppo. To do so would be the equivalent of giving up being a man. According to Kay House, "The only conclusion one can draw from all this is that Mabel’s effect is disastrous. She undermines Natty’s self-respect, destroys his pleasures, ruins his professional ability, makes him dream of his own impotence, and leaves him crushed by his isolation" (House, Americans 313). In order to preserve his most beloved character, Cooper not only has to take Natty out of the running: and he must do so in a way that allows Natty Bumppo to keep his strength, his honor, and his dignity.

This is accomplished at the end of the novel when Natty Bumppo takes the role of Mabel’s protector and father figure after Sergeant Dunham dies. Natty is given the necessary dignified opportunity to release Mabel from her pledge to be his wife when he realizes Mabel and Jasper Western love each other. In this way, he can give Mabel up and still become the self-sacrificing martyr:

We will talk no more of this; it is all over now, and may words about it will make you no happier, while they will only tell me what I’ve lost, and quite likely how much I deserved to lose her-no-no-Mabel, ‘tis useless to interrupt me...Jasper, she is yourn, and though it’s hard to think it, I do believe you’ll make her happier than I could, for your gifts are better suited to do so, though I would have strived hard to do as much, if I could. ...It’s true Mabel seemed to be consenting,
though it all came from a wish to please her father, and from being skeary about the savages— ... I shall quit you here. You will go back to Oswego and become man and wife as soon as you arrive. I shall return to the wilderness, and my maker. (Pathfinder 458-60)

Cooper has effectively resolved the issues of Mabel's marriage. The characters involved have all been assigned to their appropriate places because they followed Cooper's rules about knowing one's place in society. Sergeant Dunham dies happily, knowing his daughter's fate is in the Pathfinder's hands, a man who will do what is best for Mabel. With the sergeant removed, Mabel is allowed to marry the man she loves without upsetting the patriarchal order because Jasper Western's rank in the life of a seaman is the equivalent of her father's in the Royal Army. Natty Bumppo returns to his beloved wilderness a whole man and in the company of his best friend and brother-in-arms, Chingachgook. Lieutenant Muir, the one character who does not give up his pursuit of Mabel, is given the ultimate punishment for seeking to cross the social bounds. His treason is discovered and he pays for his treachery with his life. This ignominious death is symbolic of the social death one suffers when he or she marries beneath his or her social class. It is one of the most powerful statements Cooper makes about the consequences of not knowing your place.

While the courtship of Mabel Dunham is progressing, there is also an adventure story running parallel to it throughout the novel. When the adventure story takes the main characters out of the Oswego garrison, Cooper grants Mabel
much more freedom and power. The fight-for-survival nature of the wilderness leaves no other choice. Any character, male or female, must either adapt to his or her situation or die.

There are clear indications early in the novel that Mabel will be able to rise to the occasion. As the small party of characters (Mabel, her uncle, Natty Bumppo, and Jasper Western) moves toward the garrison, Mabel assures Jasper Western she is up to the challenge of reaching their destination even though they must pass through great danger to reach it. "I am not so feeble and weak-minded as you think, for though only a girl from the towns, and like most of that class, a little disposed to see danger where there is none, I promise you, Jasper, no foolish fears of mine shall stand in the way of your doing your duty" *(Pathfinder 91)*.

This early display of courage is a crucial step in Mabel's development as a frontier heroine. She must learn from experienced woodsmen like Jasper Western and Natty Bumppo in order to survive. Their mini-adventure on the journey to the Oswego garrison serves as a perfect training ground for Mabel. She learns, first hand, all about the dangers present in nature, as well as the cunning and skill of the Tuscarora Indians pursuing them. Instead of fainting or crying hysterically in the face of danger, as many of Cooper's earlier females do, Mabel meets the challenge head on. This first adventure also sparks a change in Mabel's view about life on the frontier versus life in the settlements. For the first time she begins to appreciate the natural world and starts to wonder what living away from cities and towns might be like:
Every thing near appeared lovely and soothing, while the silent
grandeur of the silent forest and placid expanse of the lake, lent a
sublimity that other scenes might have wanted. For the first time,
Mabel felt the hold that towns and civilization had gained on her
habits sensibly weakened, and the warm-hearted girl began to think
that a life passed amid objects such as these around her, might be
happy. (Pathfinder 172)

This new appreciation for nature, the wilderness, and life outside civilization is an
indication that Mabel is realizing her own potential. She has much more freedom
and much more control over her own life here than she did living in a society. She
relates this idea to Natty Bumppo once they reach the Oswego garrison. “I do feel
braver, out here in the woods Pathfinder, than I ever felt before amid the weaknesses
of the towns…” (Pathfinder 188). The courage Mabel finds in herself through her
experiences in the wilderness prepares her to defend the blockhouse during the
novel’s climactic scenes.

Through the course of events in the novel Mabel is separated from her
father. He is sent on a mission, along with Natty Bumppo and Jasper Western, to
stop the flow of French supplies. While the men are gone, Mabel is left in the
charge of a small group of soldiers on a remote island far from the security of the
Oswego garrison. It is in these scenes that Mabel emerges as one of Cooper’s
strongest heroines. Almost immediately after Sergeant Dunham’s party leaves on
their mission, the Tuscarora Indians in the area set a plan in motion to kill those left
behind and set up an ambush for the Sergeant’s return. Mabel is alerted to the plan because she takes a calculated risk in a potentially dangerous situation. “Mabel was suddenly alarmed by fancying she caught a glimpse of a human form among the bushes that lined the shore of the island that lay directly before her” (Pathfinder 315). This is a trying moment for Mabel. She has learned first hand about the dangers of the wilderness and is faced with a hard choice, investigation or flight. Undoubtedly the city-dwelling Mabel readers meet at the beginning of the novel would flee, but the Mabel of the wilderness has a much firmer resolve:

It was one of the peculiarities of the exposure, to which those who dwelt on the frontiers of America were liable, to bring out the moral qualities of the women to a degree, that they must themselves, under other circumstances, have believed they were incapable of manifesting, and Mabel well knew that the borderers loved to dwell, in their legends, on the presence of mind, fortitude and spirit that their wives and sisters had displayed, under circumstances most trying. Her emulation had been awakened by what she had heard on such subjects, and it at once struck her, that now was the moment for her to show that she was truly Serjeant Dunham’s child. (Pathfinder 316)

Mabel stands her ground bravely and is rewarded with news from her Indian friend, Dew-in-June about the impending Tuscarora attack. June repeatedly tells Mabel, “Blockhouse very good – good for squaw. Blockhouse got no scalp” (Pathfinder
June knows the Tuscaroras led by her husband, Arrowhead, will not attack the blockhouse because they would have to burn it. The smoke from such a fire would alert Sergeant Dunham and Natty Bumppo, whom the Tuscaroras all fear, that danger is near.

The problem for Mabel is that even with the knowledge June gives her, there is little she can do. Corporal McNab, a soldier under her father's command, is in charge of the remote island. No matter how much she speaks of the danger, the corporal's military pride will not allow him to take cover, especially on the suggestion of a woman. As a result Mabel becomes more and more frantic because she knows time is running out:

Mabel was almost in despair, but the quiet warning of June was still too vividly impressed on her mind, to allow her to yield the matter. She changed her mode of operating, therefore, still clinging to the hope of getting the whole party within the blockhouse, without being compelled to betray the source whence she obtained her notices of the necessity of vigilance. (Pathfinder 336)

Even though she fails to convince the corporal of the need to take cover, her continued efforts to persuade him show how much Mabel has grown in courage. Prior to her wilderness experiences, Mabel never would have argued with a male authority figure. The corporal's refusal to heed Mabel's words eventually costs him his life, but his actions are necessary. Had he listened to Mabel, it would have given
her too much power in a patriarchal world. The corporal’s death also serves as the
catalyst to get Mabel into the enclosed space of the blockhouse.

Once she is in a small and enclosed space Cooper is free to grant Mabel the
same power female characters in sentimental fiction enjoy because the blockhouse
represents domestic space, the upstairs parlor. Cooper is also free to grant Mabel
this power because all of the soldiers left on the island are killed during
Arrowhead’s attack, with the exception of Mabel’s uncle and Lieutenant Muir who
are missing and feared dead. Without any male authority to usurp or upset, Mabel
can act freely.

The effect entering a domestic space has on Mabel is amazing. Considering
the violent death she witnesses, Mabel should be frantic and consumed by her fear.
This, however, is not the case. Once she enters the blockhouse Mabel not only has
full use of her faculties, but she also acts in a manner one would only expect from
an experienced campaigner:

Mabel’s heart ceased to beat tumultuously, and she gained sufficient
self-command to act collectedly. Instead of yielding to the almost
convulsive efforts of her companion, to close the door, again, she
held it open long enough to ascertain that none of her own part was
in sight, or likely, on the instant to endeavor to gain admission; then
she allowed the opening to be shut. Her orders and proceedings,
now, became more calm and rational... she then ascended the first
ladder to the room above, where by means of loop-holes, she was
enabled to get as good a view of the island as the surrounding bushes
would allow. Admonishing her associate below to be firm and
steady, she made as careful an examination of the environs as her
situation permitted. (Pathfinder 339)

The calm exhibited by Mabel under these circumstances is a stark contrast to
the hysteria of Jennie, the wife of one of the slain soldiers. Unlike Mabel, she has
not learned from wilderness experiences because she has always traveled with the
whole regiment in relative safety. She cannot keep silent in the blockhouse and
repeatedly yells to Mabel for any news of her husband or the other soldiers.
Mabel’s attempts to allay Jennie's fears are in vain as courage is not something that
can be taught. Jennie does not have the courage to remain with Mabel. She needs
the protection of men to feel secure. As a result she runs away from the blockhouse
to find her husband:

Mabel heard the bar turn, and then the door creaked on its hinges.
Expectation, not to say terror, held her in suspense at the loop, and
she soon beheld Jennie rushing through the bushes, in the direction of
the cluster of the dead. It took the woman but an instant to reach the
fatal spot. So sudden and unexpected had been the blow, that she, in
her terror, did not appear to comprehend its weight.... As the horrid
truth flashed, in its full extent, on her mind, the woman clasped her
hands, gave a shriek that pierced the glades of every island near, and
fell at length on the dead body of the soldier. Thrilling, heart-
reaching, appalling as was that shriek, it was melody to the cry that followed it so quickly as to blend the sounds. The terrifying war-whoop arose out of the covers of the island, and some twenty savages, horrible in their paint, and the other devices of Indian ingenuity, rushed forward, eager to secure the coveted scalps. Arrowhead was foremost, and it was his tomahawk that brained the insensible Jennie, and her reeking hair was hanging at his girdle, as a trophy, in less than two minutes after she had quitted the blockhouse. 

(Pathfinder 341-42)

Jennie’s demise not only demonstrates her lack of courage; it is a vivid and graphic reminder to Mabel of the fate awaiting her outside the blockhouse. The enclosed space is her only chance for survival. Even inside its thick walls Mabel is unsure of her safety until June arrives. 

June is a source of strength for Mabel during the defense of the blockhouse. It is June who convinces Mabel that flight is useless because Mabel is not strong enough to outrun the Tuscaroras on land or to out paddle them in a canoe. When Mabel considers acting against the drunken Indians, it is June who reminds Mabel that she does not have the heart for killing: 

“If Lily was like June, might do much for her people.”

“I am like you, June, if a wish to serve my countryman, can make a resemblance with one as courageous as yourself.”
“No — no — no —” muttered June, in a low voice — “no got heart, and June no let you, if had. June’s moder prisoner once, and warriors got drunk; moder tomahawked ‘em all. Such the way red skin women do, when people in danger, and want scalps.”

“You say what is true,” returned Mabel shuddering, and unconsciously dropping June’s hand — “I cannot do that. I have neither the strength, the courage, nor the will to dip my hands in blood.” (Pathfinder 358)

Mabel’s revulsion at the idea of slaughtering her enemies while they are in a drunken slumber is the direct result of her civilized upbringing. Cooper is plainly stating that there are limits to the amount of power and freedom Mabel can possess. While she is able to act courageously in the face of danger and defend the blockhouse, she is not able to fully convert into the savage world of June.

This does not, however, imply that Mabel cannot learn a great deal from June. It is June’s defiant stance against her own people that encourages Mabel not to give in later when her uncle and Lieutenant Muir reappear as captives of the Tuscaroras:

“Red men,” said June, lifting a finger in admonition to be prudent.

“Four, and horrible in their paint and bloody trophies. Arrowhead is among them.”
June had moved to a corner, where several spare rifles were deposited, and had already taken one into her hand, when the name of her husband appeared to arrest her movements. It was but for an instant, however, for she immediately went to the loop, and was about to thrust the muzzle of the piece through it, when a feeling of natural aversion, induced Mabel to seize her arm.

“No-no-no-June,” said the latter—“not against your own husband, though my life may be the penalty.”

“No hurt Arrowhead—” returned June, with a slight shudder—“no hurt red man at all. No fire at ‘em;—only scare.”

Mabel now comprehended the intention of June, and no longer opposed it. (Pathfinder 347-48)

In addition to comprehending June’s plan at the moment, Mabel also learns a valuable lesson as well. When under siege or direct attack, it is sometimes necessary to act against one’s own sense of right and wrong.

Mabel is forced to put this lesson into practice almost immediately. Shortly after June disperses the party of Indians with the rifle Mabel’s uncle and Lieutenant Muir come into sight of the blockhouse, prisoners of Arrowhead. Although Mabel is tempted to give up the blockhouse in an attempt to help her uncle, his words show her this is not the proper course of action. “I would counsel no one who is out of the hands of these devils to unbar, or unfasten any thing, in order to fall into them”
Mabel remains firm and maintains the blockhouse even after Lieutenant Muir says he has surrendered it to Arrowhead.

This denial of the lieutenant is the culmination of Mabel’s growth and independence, and the most powerful statement Cooper makes about a woman’s ability to defend an enclosed space. If she were in a social space Mabel would not have the courage to defy one of her father’s superior officers, as she does Lieutenant Muir:

I know enough, Mr. Muir to understand that you have no command in this expedition, and therefore can have no right to yield the blockhouse, and, I remember, moreover, to have heard my father say, that a prisoner loses all his authority, for the time being. ... I shall remain as I am, Mr. Muir, until I get some tidings of my father. He will return in the course of the next ten days. (Pathfinder 367)

The victory Mabel wins in this verbal showdown with Lieutenant Muir emboldens her to the point that she and June again use the ruse of the rifle at the Loop to disperse their enemies. The Indians are again thwarted in their attempt to coax the women out of the blockhouse.

The successful defense of the blockhouse is as far as Cooper will extend Mabel’s power, though. He will not allow her a complete victory over her enemies. Military victory is still strictly for men. Arrowhead is not defeated until the return of the sergeant’s party. Natty Bumppo is the first to reach Mabel, and once he does, she immediately turns complete control of the situation to him. Throughout the rest
of the fight against Arrowhead and the Tuscaroras Mabel fulfills a more traditional feminine role. She takes care of her father, as he lies dying. “Mabel, in this trying scene, conducted herself with the sort of unnatural energy that her sex, when aroused, is apt to manifest. She got the light, administered water to the parched lips of her father, and assisted Pathfinder in forming a bed of straw, for his body, and a pillow of clothes for his head” (Pathfinder 382-83).

This re-transformation of Mabel Dunham is the only one imaginable in Cooper’s world. The return of Sergeant Dunham and Natty Bumppo marks the return patriarchal authority. Even though she is still within the walls of an enclosed and "domestic" space, Mabel must submit. Her submission does not, however, diminish her role in the victory won over the Tuscaroras, nor does it indicate that she will return to being the Mabel Dunham from the beginning of the novel who needs to be protected from every danger she encounters. On the contrary, her defense of the blockhouse and all her wilderness experiences have prepared her for the challenges she will face as the wife of a man of the sea.

By marrying Jasper Western Mabel sets up a life of cycles shifting between independence and dependence. While Jasper is away on his aquatic voyages Mabel will have to take care of herself and protect her home and family as best she can. Every time Jasper returns home she will have to submit to his will. This constant switch from independence to dependence (and obedience) will undoubtedly prove to be a major challenge for Mabel. Once a strong woman gets used to making her own decisions and controlling her own actions, it is difficult to then submit to another’s
will, even the will of her husband. Mabel must make this sacrifice though, or she
will suffer Cooper’s consequences for defying patriarchal authority.
Chapter 3

Cooper's Social Criticism and the Imbalance of Power in the Effingham Novels

Often when scholars wish to discuss the autobiographical nature of Cooper's fiction, the first place they look is *The Pioneers*. Much has been made of the similarities between Cooper's hometown, which bears his father's name, and Templeton, the setting of *The Pioneers*. Many scholars are also quick to point out that Judge Temple, the principal landowner and highest-ranking official in Templeton, is a fictional version of William Cooper, James Fenimore Cooper's father. The evidence for such comparisons is definitely sound. Many of Cooper's experiences and recollections line the pages of the first Leatherstocking tale. This early experiment in using personal experiences as the basis for his fiction set the stage for two later novels that are not only biographical in nature, but are also two of Cooper's harshest statements of social criticism about America.

*Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, often referred to as either the Home novels or the Effingham novels, are the direct result of Cooper's seven years abroad and the disillusion with America he felt upon his return to his native land. They represent and express the distress Cooper felt about the fading role of the genteel, landed class in America as the nation moved further and further toward capitalism, as well as Cooper's own conflicts with newspapers and the residents of Cooperstown over the use of his family's land.
The fading role of the genteel class in America was Cooper's primary concern when he began to write what was supposed to be one novel, but eventually developed into two. In his preface to *Homeward Bound* Cooper states:

In one respect, this book is a parallel to Franklin's well-known apologue of the hatter and his sign. It was commenced with a sole view to exhibit the present state of society in the United States, through the agency, in part, of a set of characters with different peculiarities, who had freshly arrived from Europe, and to whom the distinctive features of the country would be apt to present themselves with greater force, than to those who had never lived beyond the confluence of the things portrayed. (*Homeward Bound* 5)

The end result is one man's treatise on what he felt was a nation of unlimited potential in the midst of destroying itself through economic and social change.

Cooper was a man set in his ways who by an unfortunate twist of fate found himself living at the cusp of tremendous change. "His busy life covered the middle years of the great shift from an aristocratic order to capitalistic order and this revolutionary change provided him ample material for brooding speculation" (Parrington 14). The fruits of this "brooding speculation" combined with his time in Europe were the beginning of the end of Cooper's popularity with the American reading public. Cooper was destined to suffer the same fate Herman Melville found after the publication of *Moby Dick*. The fans of Cooper's early romantic adventure
tales like *The Spy*, *The Pioneers*, and *The Last of the Mohicans* were not nearly as accepting of what they perceived as critical attacks on America:

Honored as a poet, Cooper departed without any indication that he was, or should be, a critic of the society he was leaving behind.

Seven years in Europe do little for any American's reputation, but Cooper suffered more than most. During those years the social criticism that had in fact always been a part of Cooper's fiction became much more obvious. ...Naturally, his shift from action to inquiry was not popular with the American public. The complaint was twofold: first, that he had no business to write problem novels of any sort; second, that any sort of criticism of America... was indefensible.

(Field 5-6)

Just as Melville could not remain a writer of travelogues, Cooper could not remain a writer of only historical romances. Vernon Louis Parrington sums up Cooper's need to move forward as writer this way: "Cooper was a democrat who criticized the ways of a reputed democracy because of his love for an ideal republic. Too few of his kind have arisen in America, too few who dare to speak their minds unstirred by public opinion" (15). The lack of public acceptance could not deter Cooper from his new course. He believed too strongly in his own ideal version of society. In order for America to survive, it needed a gentility to lead by example. In Cooper's mind, this was the only way America could take its proper place among the world's dominant powers:
He loved the world that was falling into decay too much to put away its virtues with its small clothes; he would preserve what was excellent in the old to enrich and dignify what was excellent in the new; he would have the young democracy learn the decorum of a staid aristocracy. He was an English squire of the old school turned republican who did not quite like the company he found himself in. (Parrington 15)

The American company Cooper found when he returned from Europe was so radically different from the one he left seven years before, it almost caused him to stop writing altogether:

So disillusioned was he that less than one year after his return to America he wrote "A Letter to his Countrymen" and announced his intention to "lay aside" his pen. He did not, however, stop writing, although for a while he concentrated on satire and nonfiction. By 1837, his battle with newspapers and his conflict with residents of Cooperstown over use of family land in the Three Mile Point controversy had taken him into the courts and, in 1838, into another novel – or, more precisely; into two more novels, Home as Found and Homeward Bound. (Fields 6)

With the resumption of his career as a writer of fiction, Cooper used Homeward Bound and Home as Found to argue his case for the necessity of the genteel class.
Although the two Home novels combine to tell one complete story, Cooper sets them up very differently. *Homeward Bound* is an adventure story of the sea complete with chases, shipwrecks, and a narrow escape from hostile Arabs on the coast of Africa. In many ways it is very similar to a Leatherstocking tale, except Natty Bumppo is not one of the characters, and the sea takes the place of the forest. Within the context of the adventure, Cooper sets up *Homeward Bound* as a novel of manners. The conflicts between the Effinghams, a model genteel family, and Steadfast Dodge, the editor of *The American Inquirer* become a guide for the proper ways to act in Cooper's version of an ideal society. According to David Darnell:

*Homeward Bound* is an instructive work on manners and class. By the actions and comments of genteel characters and his own authorial commentary Cooper establishes a code of conduct for the upper classes that invites emulation. There are positive examples presented in the demeanor and conduct of the genteel characters and contrasting negative behaviors by Dodge and Henry Sandon. One learns for example that it is wrong to question servants about their masters, that it is unmanly to talk about a person behind his back, that ladies and gentlemen do not gossip, that one doesn't presume acquaintance, that privacy is a right, not a privilege, and that one should know one's place and respect the differences that separate one from one's social superiors. *Homeward Bound* in effect does double didactic duty. It provides an upper-class readership with examples and reminders of
correct behavior and informs a less privileged audience that what separates the classes is not money, but manners. (76)

These instructions Darnell speaks of manifest themselves in the contrasts Cooper draws between Steadfast Dodge and the Effingham family. Throughout the entire novel the Effinghams, especially Eve, are presented as the model of gentility for all to look upon and emulate. Steadfast Dodge on the other hand is presented as socially inept and obtuse. His utter disregard for the customs of genteel society draws the scorn of the ladies and gentlemen, and that of their servants as well. Dodge becomes the model of how not to act.

Cooper begins the contrast almost immediately with a description of the Montauk. The ship serves as a microcosm for society in the same way the Oswego garrison does in The Pathfinder. Just as the military has a rigid social structure based on rank, the accommodations on a passenger ship are laid out according to social and economic class. While the lower income and lower class passengers are housed far below deck in steerage, the upper income and upper class passengers are closer to deck level.

The characters who can afford the best accommodations are further delineated by whether they have their own staterooms or share one with another passenger:

...Packet-ships have usually two berths in each stateroom, but they who can afford to pay an extra charge are permitted to occupy the little apartment singly. It is scarcely necessary to add that persons of gentlemanly feeling, when circumstances will at all permit, prefer
economizing in other things in order to live by themselves for the month usually consumed in the passage, since in nothing is refinement more plainly exhibited than in the reserve of personal habits.

(Homeward 22)

The Effinghams each have their own stateroom, a luxury they can afford without economizing in other areas. Such is not the case for Steadfast Dodge. He must share a stateroom with a man who claims to be Sir George Templemore, but is in fact an impostor. This contrast in wealth is only the first of many between the Effinghams and Dodge. It is important because it sets the tone for those that follow. It also shows how little a man like Dodge understands upper class society. Dodge assumes the Effinghams think themselves better than everyone else because of their wealth. The reality is that they enjoy private conversations and quiet reserve.

The idea of private conversations is a concept completely lost on Steadfast Dodge. His belief in the total equality of all Americans makes him blind to any indications that he is not welcome when the Effinghams meet in Eve’s stateroom with Mr. Sharp and Mr. Blunt. Dodge’s beliefs are clearly expressed in his conversation with those gathered. “All that I mean is that in particular things, one man is as good as another in America. This is American doctrine, though it may not happen to be English, and I flatter myself it will stand the test of the strictest investigation” (Homeward 107).

Of course, if he understood the hints and looks thrown at him, Dodge would not have been in a position to explain these views at all. His admittance into the
stateroom is one of courtesy extended only because he is a countryman, and because the Effinghams have too much class to treat him in a manner that is rude:

   Mr. Effingham gave their visitor a polite reception, and one that was marked with a little more than the usual formality, by way of letting it be understood that the apartment was private; a precaution that he knew was very necessary in associating with tempers like Steadfast. All this was thrown away on Mr. Dodge, notwithstanding every other person present admired the tact with which the host kept his guest at a distance, by extreme attention, for the latter so much ceremony was but a homage to his claims. (Homeward 104)

Dodge does not realize he is not welcome among this group and makes the mistake of thinking his job and title impresses them. In reality, the fact that Dodge is a newspaper editor only serves to draw more disdain from the Effinghams. Their opinion of Dodge reflects Cooper’s own well-known dislike for that industry. When one takes Cooper’s lawsuits for libel against the American press into account, it is easy to see why Cooper chose to make Dodge a reporter and editor. By doing so, Cooper allows himself to take several shots at his enemies, and for once, make them the targets of gossip, as well as the butt of his jokes. Personal angst aside, Dodge’s intrusion allows Cooper to highlight the elegance and polish of Eve Effingham. When her father’s attempt quietly to get rid of Dodge fails, Eve take over in a graceful and polite manner:
“We have had a considerable pleasant time, Miss Effingham, since we sailed from Portsmouth,” he observed familiarly.

Eve bowed her assent, determined not to take to herself a visit that did violence to all her habits and notions of propriety. But Mr. Dodge was too obtuse to feel the hint conveyed in mere reserve of manner. (Homeward 104)

Instead of taking the hint, Dodge blunders along in a conversation with those assembled about the nature of equality in America, championing its virtue all the while. He never realizes his argument is poked full of holes and that everyone is laughing at him rather than with him.

It is not until John Effingham can take no more of Mr. Dodge’s ramblings and states his intention of returning the favor of Dodge’s visit by making himself comfortable in the apartment of Mr. Dodge and Sir George Templemore (the imposter) that Dodge realizes he is viewed as an intruder. Even he cannot miss the point that John Effingham is calling attention to the fact that Dodge cannot afford his own stateroom and, therefore, must share accommodations. Unfortunately, Dodge misses the point completely, as his actions indicate:

Here Mr. Dodge beat a retreat, without touching at all on his real errand. Instead of even following up the matter with other passengers, he got into a corner, with one or two congenial spirits, who had taken great offence that the Effinghams should presume to retire into their cabin, and particularly that they should have the extreme aristocratical
audacity to shut the door, where he continued pouring into the greedy ears of his companions his own history of the recent dialogue, in which according to his own account of the matter, he had completely gotten the better of that "young upstart, Blunt," a man of whom he knew positively nothing, divers anecdotes of the Effingham family; that came of the lowest and most idle gossip of rustic malignancy, and his own vague and confused notions of the rights of persons and of things. (Homeward 110-11)

The point Dodge is missing is that the Effinghams do not look down on him because of wealth and economics. Their complaint against him stems from his lack of knowledge about social manners. Until he learns the acceptable customs of a refined, genteel society, he can never be a viable member of it. Instead, he will be on the outside looking in. The more he tries to intrude on that society, the more its members' contempt for him will grow.

The only thing that can sustain Dodge is his belief that once they reach America he will triumph over the Effinghams and they will get their comeuppance: it is the desperate hope of a man trying to delude himself about his own importance:

Mr. Dodge was now swelling with the conceit of a vulgar and inflated man, who not only fancies himself in possession of a power that others dread, but was so far blinded to his own qualities as to think his opinion of importance to those whom he felt, in the minutest fibre of his envious and malignant system to be in every essential his superiors.
"These Effinghams, and this Mr. Sharp, and that Mr. Blunt," he muttered, "think themselves everybody's betters, but we shall see! America is not a country in which people can shut themselves up in rooms, and fancy they are lords and ladies...Mr. John Effingham, he has been so long abroad that he has forgotten that he is a going home to a country of equal rights!" (Homeward 189)

Dodge does not understand the fundamental fact that equal rights does not mean one man is as good as another. It means that each man has a chance to achieve everything guaranteed by the doctrine of democracy, but only if he understands social manners and plays by society's rules.

Dodge cannot do this because he is inept when it comes to manners. This is clearly pointed out by Eve Effingham when she alludes to Benjamin Franklin's rise in society. "Monsieur Franklin commenced life as a printer; but, living to a great age, and rising to high employments, he became a philosopher in morals, as his studies had made him one in physics. Now, America is full of printers, and most of them fancy themselves Franklins, until time and failures teach them discretion" (Homeward 216). Clearly, Eve is referring to Dodge's view of his own self-importance. He sees himself on par with a man considered one of the greatest leaders and thinkers in American history, whereas the Effinghams and the other gentlemen on board view him as a vulgar gossip who edits a vulgar and uninformed piece of journalistic trash. Furthermore, there is no indication he will ever learn discretion.
Later in the novel, when the Effinghams, Captain Truck, and various other passengers go to investigate a shipwreck off the coast of Africa, Dodge uses the time to snoop around the private apartments. This is yet another transgression those who know social manners would never commit. In Cooper's vision of society, a person's privacy is not just a privilege; it is his right. By violating that right, Dodge again becomes an object of contempt as is illustrated in one of the most heated scenes in *Homeward Bound*:

"It would seem," returned Eve, assuming a solemnity suited to a matter of interest, "that our secret is discovered. While we were indulging our curiosity about this unfortunate ship, Mr. Dodge was gratifying the laudable industry of 'The American Enquirer' by prying into our staterooms."

"This meanness is impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Effingham.

(*Homeward* 234)

Of course, all present feel the same sense of outraged revulsion as Mr. Effingham. The audacity of the act and the complete lack of respect it shows are almost incomprehensible to them. Cooper uses this scene to express his own frustrations regarding his homeland's lack of refined manners. It is really Cooper speaking about America when John Effingham addresses the issue with his cousin:

"If you entertain such notions of decorum, your wisest way, Edward, will be to return to the place whence you have come; for, trust me, you will find scores of such gentlemen where you are going."
"I shall not allow you to persuade me I know my own country so little. Conduct like this will stamp a man with disgrace in America as well as elsewhere."

"Conduct like this would, but it will no longer. The pell-mell that rages has brought honorable men into a sad minority, and even Mr. Dodge will tell you the majority must rule. Were he to publish my letter, a large portion of his readers would fancy he was merely asserting the liberty of the press. Heavens save us! You have been dreaming abroad, Mr. Effingham, while your country has retrograded, in all that is respectable and good, a century in a dozen years."

(Homeward 236)

The letter in question praises Eve and leads Dodge to believe John Effingham plans to marry her. The idea is preposterous because John Effingham treats his niece as if she were his own daughter. The scandalous nature of the article Dodge might write, since the union of such close relatives is frowned upon, enrages Edward Effingham to the point that he proclaims his intention to discontinue all communications with Steadfast Dodge. It is Eve who convinces him otherwise:

"Think better of it, dear father, " said Eve, "for such a man is scarcely worthy of even your resentment. He is too much your inferior in principles, manners, character, station and everything else, to render him of so much account; and then, were we to clear up this masquerade into which the chances of a ship have thrown us, we might
have our scruples concerning others, as well as concerning this wolf in sheep's clothing.” (Homeward 237)

Eve realizes it is better to leave well enough alone and let the matter die on its own. Drawing attention to it will only serve to fan the flames of Dodge's view of his own self-importance. By ignoring the matter they can remind Dodge of his insignificance.

The harshness of Cooper's criticism is such that his contemporary readers could not possibly miss it. The acidic tone of his words is more than just a little responsible for the waning of his popularity. It was enough of a slap in the face when he left the country for seven years. To return home only to criticize the state of American society was almost unforgivable. This reaction from the public was somewhat surprising to Cooper. He could not understand the reaction because his criticism was not intended solely to rake his country over the coals. He did not wish to proclaim the superiority of Europe. Rather his love for America was so great that he did not want to see the nation destroyed. His vision was of an America that took the best of the old world manners and class and left the worst behind in order to forge a type of democracy that would be the best form of government in history:

Cooper's conclusion is that his country has a priceless heritage, which she must guard and a brilliant future toward which she must work. The heritage is twofold: European tradition grants to her the culture and the sanity which comes from long living; American resources grant exemption from the evils and prejudices attendant upon that culture. (Spiller 221-22)
Taken in this light, *Homeward Bound* is more than an instructive work on manners and class; it is a warning against what America might become if social manners are lost. Cooper's belief and fear is that without social manners and a genteel class society inevitably falls apart. Instead of being the great democracy, America will regress to a state no better than the barbarism described in the novel while the ship is stuck in Africa. Cooper drives home this point in a conversation between John and Eve Effingham:

"It is one of the mysteries of the grand designs of providence, that men should exist in conditions so widely distant from each other," said John Effingham abruptly, "with a common nature that can be so much varied by circumstances. It is almost a humiliation to find one's self a man, when beings like these Arabs are classed as fellows."

"The most instructed and refined, cousin Jack, may get a useful lesson... By showing us what we might be ourselves, we get an admonition of humility; or by reflecting on the difference that is made by education, does it not strike you that there is an encouragement to persevere until better things are attained?" (*Homeward* 435)

Eve's words ring truer than she could ever have anticipated. Aside from a few acquaintances they visit when they first arrive in New York City, the America the Effinghams find upon their return is very different from the one they left twelve years earlier. The warning John Effingham gave his cousin proves to be true. There is
nothing for the Effinghams to do but persevere in their refined ways and wait for better things.

It is interesting to note the amount of power and control Eve wields throughout *Homeward Bound*. In several instances she makes a fool out of Steadfast Dodge. True, he is her social inferior, but he is still a man, and yet Cooper allows Eve to overpower him verbally and intellectually even when they are in social settings aboard the ship. This seems to go against Cooper’s normal practice of only granting female characters power in dangerous situations or in private spaces.

There are two possible explanations for this deviation from Cooper’s normal practice. The first is that the characters are aboard a small ship, and therefore they are still in an enclosed space. In fact, many of the conversations take place in Eve’s stateroom. Therefore, the setting of these scenes is no different than if it were in the upstairs parlor described by Jane Tompkins. The second explanation is that most of Eve’s opinions are mirror images of Edward and John Effingham’s. Since she is agreeing with the views and beliefs of these two powerful men, she is not threatening to upset the patriarchal order. She is strengthening it.

*Home as Found* is the continuation of its predecessor, dealing with what happens after the sea adventure is over and the Effinghams return to America safely. Set both in New York City and in Templeton, the novel offers the Effinghams a chance to see first hand all the changes that have occurred in the twelve years of their absence. Throughout much of the plot, Cooper compares and contrasts the polished
and refined manners of the Effinghams, especially Eve Effingham, with the nouveau riche now inhabiting Templeton:

In the first quarter of Home as Found Cooper comes very close to his achievement in Precaution [Cooper's first novel] in depicting the social scene where nouveau rich confronted established wealth. In a series of social gatherings the reader observes the confrontations of old New York and new as the Effinghams make their reintroductions to New York society and present their views on its state. (Darnell 77)

These views are often unflattering. Aside from one or two of the ladies residing in New York City, the rest of the inhabitants the Effinghams interact with often pale in comparison. The polish and refinement gained from their twelve years in Europe easily outshine those who pass for high society in New York City.

Cooper shows this early in Home As Found when Mrs. Houston, a member of New York City's elite society opens her house to guests for a ball. While most of the guests are of the genteel class in America, the grace and refinement of Eve Effingham shines as brightly as a beacon lighting the way for others:

The quadrille now ended and Eve returned towards her friends. As she approached, the whole party compared her quiet, simple, feminine, and yet dignified air, with the restless, beau-catching, and worldly look of the belle, [Miss Ring, who freely gossips about Eve Effingham] and wondered by what law of nature or of fashion the one could possibly become the subject of the other's comments. Eve never appeared
better than on that evening. Her dress had all the accuracy and finish of a Parisian toilette, being equally removed from exaggeration and neglect; and it was worn with the ease of one accustomed to be elegantly attired, and yet never decked with finery... Walk alone she could certainly, and always did, except on those occasions of ceremony that demanded a partner. (Home As Found 69)

The understated elegance of Eve Effingham is definitely preferable to the overstated gaudiness of Miss Ring.

The contrast between these two characters is the perfect lead-in for Cooper's comments on the state of American society. When he returned from Europe, Cooper found America to be made up of people following customs and practices they believed popular. In one scene several "ladies" and "gentlemen" argue whether or not it is permitted to smoke in genteel society:

"Do my eyes deceive me, or is not that writer of e – e – e fumigating us all!" whispered Miss Annual.

"Nay, this cannot certainly be right," put in Florio, with a dogmatical manner. "All the periodicals agree that smoking is ungenteeel in England."

"You never were more mistaken, dear Florio," replied D. O. V. E. in a cooing tone. "The very last novel of society has a chapter in which the hero and heroine smoke in the declaration scene."
“Do they indeed! That alters the case. Really, one would not wish to get behind so great a nation, nor yet to go much before it.”

(Home As Found 92-93)

This blind following of British pursuits is not the vision Cooper had for America. The genteel class was supposed to be a group of leaders, not followers. Their customs should be their own, and American, not British. "To Cooper's mind, America had reached a degree of civilization at which the national character should begin to take steps and to find expression in arts, institutions, and manners" (Spiller 262). The only way to shape a national character would be to shape these pursuits to American tastes. This is, of course, what Cooper himself did with his literature when he adapted Scott's style to the American frontiers.

In Home As Found, it is Eve Effingham who shows the necessary break from old customs. Her independence and strength of character allow her to shed former social bonds, and set an example for Miss Ring, Grace Van Cortland, and the other prominent females in New York City. When Miss Ring frets because she is left speaking to Eve without a gentleman around to escort them, Eve does the unthinkable and simply walks away:

"I am sure, Miss Effingham, one who has seen as much of society as you, can scarcely ask that? Seriously. I do not think I have done so improper a thing since I was fifteen, and, dear me! dear me! how to escape is the question. You have permitted your partner to go,
and I do not see a gentleman of my acquaintance near us, to me his arm!"

"As your distress is occasioned by my company," said Eve, "it is fortunately in my power to relieve it." Thus saying, she quietly walked across the room, and took her seat next to Madame Viefville.

Miss Ring held up her hands in amazement, and then fortunately perceiving one of the truants gaping at no great distance, she beckoned him to her side.

"Have the goodness to give me your arm, Mr. Summerfield," she said; "I am dying to get out of this unpleasantly conspicuous situation, but you are the first gentleman that has approached me this twelvemonth. I would not for the world do so brazen a thing as Miss Effingham has just achieved; would you believe it, she positively went from this spot to her seat, quite alone!" (Home As Found 71)

The scene serves two important functions in the novel. First, the distress of Miss Ring over not having an escort and the almost paralyzing fear it generates in her are similar to the effect Cooper felt not having a genteel class would have on America. Instead of moving forward as a nation, America would become a stagnant carbon copy of Europe, especially England. Second, and more important, it sets Eve Effingham apart from the other females by allowing her to play a more masculine role, at least in this space.
The power Cooper grants Eve at a social gathering in a private home is similar to the power Mabel Dunham has defending the blockhouse in *The Pathfinder*. In the circumstance of a ball, Eve does not need a male escort. Her education and experience have taught her independence and the nature of the event does not limit it. It is after all only a ball. This type of social gathering is the arena of women. Cooper gives Eve any amount of power because the situation has little to do with men. An interesting difference between Eve Effingham and Mabel Dunham is that Cooper grants Eve more power and freedom even though Eve is not in the wilderness. When arguing with Steadfast Dodge and Aristabulus Bragg about making changes in the church of Templeton, Eve does not back down and accept the ideas of the two men. She maintains her own ideals and even wins the argument:

> On the present occasion...the earnestness of Eve produced a pacifying effect on their consciences, for, as our heroine never raised her sweet voice above the tones of a gentle woman; its very mildness and softness gave force to her expressions. Had John Effingham uttered the statements to which they had just listened, it is probable Mr. Bragg would have attempted an answer, but under the circumstances, he preferred making his bow and diverging into the first path that offered, followed by his companion. (*Home As Found* 326)

Eve's boldness and ultimate victory in this scene is attributable to her social class. Were she not the social superior of Dodge and Bragg, the outcome would likely be very different. For instance, if the argument were with her uncle, or her father, or a
gentleman like Paul Powis or Sir George Templemore (the real one, not the impostor) Cooper could not allow Eve to win the argument because she would be usurping their power. In fact, Eve is more than willing to submit to her father's wishes. Near the end of the novel Eve tells her father she will forgo her own desires to accept his choice for her in matrimony. "I will marry none without your consent, and have absolute confidence in your tender care of me, that I do not even hesitate to say I will marry him to whom you contract me" (Home As Found 383). This willingness to accept her father's choice is rewarded by Cooper, as Eve marries the man of her choice, Paul Powis.

It is also in this novel that Cooper uses his own conflict with the residents of Cooperstown over the use of family land to express his deep seated fears about "Mob Rule" and the trend towards oligarchy he saw in America. Cooper feared that it might be possible for the uneducated masses to twist the ideals of democracy in such a way as to crush the rights of individuals, especially individuals of nobility and gentility:

Cooper believed in democratic government; and, as an aggressively patriotic American, he was capable, among the enemies of democratic theory, of going to considerable length in its defense; but he distrusted the common and uneducated man – that is, he feared irrational mob action; he feared that the idea of democracy might easily be degraded into the dogma that whatever a majority decides is right. Such a degradation would result naturally in the immediate subversion of law
and of civilization; and it would open the way for all kinds of illegal
individual action, which might in turn lead to the acquisition by a few
uneducated and unscrupulous men of great power, either by way of
finance or by way of demagoguery – that is, he saw that it might be
only a short step from irrational democracy to unscrupulous oligarchy.
(Winters 16-17)

It is ironic that Cooper's great fear was the exact opposite of what the majority
of Americans feared in the early part of the nineteenth century. With the war for
American Independence still fresh in many people's minds, and the War of 1812 less
than thirty years behind them, most of his countrymen still feared the tyranny of a
monarch or a very select few. Cooper, on the other hand, feared the power of the
masses as an even worse form of tyranny because these transgressions often could go
on without notice, let alone fear of reprisal:

This is, perhaps, the worst species of tyranny. He who suffers under
the arbitrary power of a single despot, or by the selfish exactions of a
privileged few, is certain to be sustained by the sympathies of the
masses. But he who is crushed by the masses themselves must look
beyond the limits of his earthly being for consolation and support. The
wrongs committed by democracies are of the most cruel character; and
though wanting in that apparent violence and sternness that mark the
course of law in the hands of narrower governments, for it has no need
of this severity, they carry with them in their course all the feelings that render injustice and oppression intolerable. (Winters 18-19)

Cooper's beliefs in this regard earned him the label of aristocrat, especially after his family's return from Europe. "When, after almost eight years abroad, the Coopers returned to America late in 1833, they must have seemed aloof and aristocratic, their attitude insinuating criticism of American ways. Everything about them was strange, their clothes, the furniture they imported, their foreign servants, and the manners of the children – Even the cat was French" (Leary 277). This was grossly unfair because the last thing Cooper ever wanted to see in America was an aristocracy. Although he believed in the gentry and the landed class, Cooper did not want to see that class of men gain narrow political power. It was this type of rule that eventually led to the American Revolution. As Allen Axelrad states, "In the formulation he developed and would thereafter maintain, commercial or financial wealth combined with political power – not title or family name – was the key to aristocracy. Hence the distinction between a business and a landed elite was crucial, was the distinction between rural gentry and aristocrats" ("Aristocracy Forsooth" 9).

The key to understanding Cooper's motives in both his personal court case and in his writing of Home As Found is Cooper's beliefs about the role of the gentleman in society:

The social duties of a gentleman [says Cooper] are of a high order.

The class to which he belongs is the natural repository of the manners, tastes, tone, and, to a certain extent, of the principles of a country.
They who imagine this portion of the community useless drones, who consume without producing, have not studied society, or they have listened to the suggestions of personal envy instead of consulting history and facts. If the laborer is indisposible to civilization, so is also the gentleman. While the one produces, the other directs his skill to those arts, which raise the polished man above the barbarian.

(Spiller 257)

The barbarians, in the case of the novel, are the residents of Templeton who are trying to claim a portion of Edward Effingham's land as public property. The land itself is not the real issue. Mr. Effingham states that he is willing to allow the residents to picnic there provided the Effingham family is not using the land at the time. The real issue is the right of the individual to stand his ground against the masses. The law of the nation must support the legal owner of the land and not succumb to the whims of mob rule.

Just as Cooper refused to give in to the majority in Cooperstown, Edward Effingham refuses to give in to the majority in Templeton. Through his lawyer, Aristabulus Bragg, Mr. Effingham embarks on a legal battle to secure what is rightfully his:

"I wish to know, sir," Mr. Effingham commenced, without introduction, "whether there can be any mistake concerning the ownership of the Fishing Point on the west side of the lake."

"Certainly not, sir; it belongs to the public."
Mr. Effingham’s cheeks glowed, and he looked astonished; but he remained calm. (Home As Found 206)

This opening dialogue between Mr. Effingham and Bragg lays out the parameters for the two sides of the argument.

The people of Templeton feel they have a claim to the land based on two legal titles, the first being use, the second, that the land was a special gift from Mr. Effingham’s father. The only problem for the townspeople is that they have no proof that the late Mr. Effingham made any such gift to the public. Aristabulus Bragg admits as much to Edward and John Effingham. “I admit, Mr. John Effingham, that I have seen neither deed nor law, and I doubt if the latter exist. Still the public must have some claim, for it is impossible that everybody should be mistaken.” (Home As Found 210-11)

After assuring Bragg that nothing could be easier or more common than for a mob to be mistaken, the Effinghams produce their proof of ownership regarding the Fishing Point:

While his cousin was speaking Mr. [Edward] Effingham went to a secretaire, and taking out a large bundle of papers, he laid it down on the table, unfolding several parchment deeds, to which massive seals, bearing the arms of the late colony, as well as those of England, were pendent.
“Here are my titles sir,” he said, addressing Aristabulus, pointedly; “if the public has a better, let it be produced, and I shall at once submit to its claim.” *(Home As Found* 211)

The public, of course, has no better proof, or any proof of ownership at all for that matter. All it can do is to attempt to seize the property by means of coercion.

This is what the people do with the Effinghams' old nemesis, Steadfast Dodge, leading the charge. Dodge manipulates the power of the press to argue the public's case and to get some personal revenge on the Effinghams. The result is a purely fabricated article written with help from the town's gossip, Mrs. Abbot:

Mr. Dodge was as good as his word, and the account appeared. The press throughout the country seized with avidity on anything that helped fill its columns. No one appeared disposed to inquire into the truth of the account, or after the character of the original authority. It was in print, and that struck the great majority of the editors and their readers, as a sufficient sanction. *(Home As Found* 238)

These are the very tactics Cooper is criticizing in the novel. They are also the reason he feels a genteel class is necessary. Without it, any unscrupulous person, or a small group of unscrupulous people, can sway the general public to do its bidding. The point is driven home quite clearly by Eve Effingham's response to Mr. Dodge's article:

“Miss Effingham has been grieved, disappointed, nay, shocked,” said Eve, “but still she will not despair of the republic. None of our
respectable neighbors, in the first place have shared in this transaction, and that is something; though I confess I feel surprise that any considerable portion of a community, that respects itself, should quietly allow an ignorant fragment of its own numbers to misrepresent it so grossly, in an affair that so nearly touches its own character for common-sense and justice." (Home As Found 240)

Through Eve, Cooper is calling the public to task. He is reminding them that there are two ways of doing things: the right way and the wrong way. The refined and cultured class always exhibits the practices and modes of decision-making Cooper feels are right. Those who do not emulate this behavior are always wrong. Thus, the Effingham novels stand as examples of what could happen when the wrong way is chosen too often. They only avoid ending in despair because the Effinghams are refined and polished enough to always choose the right way of doing things. If men like Steadfast Dodge were to win all the arguments, the novels would cease to be instruction manuals for societal manners. Instead, they would be examples of what not to do and how not to act.

The dispute over the ownership of the point also serves to contrast the different types of power Cooper gives to male characters with that he gives female characters. Edward and John Effingham engage in a very public legal battle with the people of Templeton and are victorious. They have the documents to prove Edward owns the property in question and will not back down. Because they are men, they can take on the town and emerge victorious because social spaces, especially political
ones like the courthouse or town hall, are the arena of men. Eve on the other hand has power in situations like balls and calling on their neighbors. Although she supports her father’s claim to the land in question, she wields no real power during the dispute. She only derides Steadfast Dodge after her father and his cousin have already won the legal battle.
The Ways of the Hour: Cooper’s Final Protest Against Social Change

Cooper’s last novel, *The Ways of the Hour*, is by far his most ambitious criticism of the state of American society. Published in 1850, shortly before Cooper’s death, *The Ways of the Hour* represents the author’s views on many of the social changes he saw in the late 1840’s. According to Donald Darnell:

Cooper’s last novel takes its title from the changes that are sweeping the republic, none of which the author and his spokesman – protagonist Thomas Dunscomb – approve. Under attack in the novel are abuses in the American jury system, the frequency of divorce, new laws which give women control of their property, and women’s assertion of their rights. (113)

Unfortunately, because the novel attempts to address such a wide variety of topics, critics often malign it because it fails to fully develop any of them.

Critical disparity aside, *The Ways of the Hour* remains one of the best examples of Cooper’s attitude towards the role of the female in American society. The novel’s heroine, Mary Monson, is an example of a strong and fiercely independent woman, the type Cooper felt would destroy the structure of the American family.

In *The Ways of the Hour*, he [Cooper] vigorously argues against equality of the sexes, seeing in equality a threat to the sanctity of the family institution. The family, as the basic unit of socialization, is
opposed to the social disorder characteristic of a large stage in the cycle of history. Just as it is opposed to the anarchic wilderness or savage state. (Axelrad, *History* 13)

Thus Cooper only allows Mary Monson to have control and power over her situation when she is in an enclosed space. Her jail cell serves the same function as the blockhouse does for Mabel Dunham in *The Pathfinder*.

Mary Monson is able to manipulate her lawyers and the people of Bibery, Duke’s County, New York while she is in prison because she is defending her life. She cannot, however, maintain that power and control after she leaves her cell. Allowing her to do so would threaten the authority of the patriarchal government.

The challenge for Cooper is that in creating this character he created a paradox for himself. Mary has many of the traits he greatly admires: sophistication, social manners, intelligence, and grace but she is also too strong and independent to fit into Cooper’s ideal model of society:

Of particular importance to the manners theme is the ambivalent attitude Cooper displays toward Mary. Although he approves of her aristocratic taste and manners...he thoroughly condemns her “independent” nature, which causes her to leave her husband and demand control of her property and fortune. ...Approving her demeanor in the face of the hostility of the common folk, he must yet condemn her for her independence, her philosophical position on her rights, and her action from that principle. (Darnell 113)
Mary’s insistence about her rights and the rights of all women goes against everything Cooper believed about the family structure, and by extension, society’s structure as well.

At the heart of Cooper’s social criticism in *The Ways of the Hour* is the Married Women’s Property Act of New York State, 1849. Prior to the passing of this law, a married woman had to forfeit all control of her property to her husband. She also could not acquire any new property during her marriage. The Married Women’s Property Act changed that law. The 1848 statute, as amended in 1849 reads as follows:

An act for the more effectual protection of the property of married women:

1. The real property of any female who may hereafter marry, and which she shall own at the time of marriage, and the rents, issues, and profits thereof, shall not be subject to the sole disposal of her husband, nor liable for his debts, and shall continue her sole and separated property, as if she were a single female.

2. The real and personal property, and the rents, issues, and profits thereof, of any female now married, shall not be subject to the disposal of her husband; but shall be her sole and separate property, as if she were a single female, except so far as the same may be liable for the debts of her husband heretofore contracted.
3. Any married female may take by inheritance, or by gift, grant, devise, or bequest, from any person other than her husband, and hold to her sole and separate use, and convey and devise real and personal property, and any interest or estate therein, and the rents, issues, and profits thereof, in the same manner and with like effect as if she were unmarried, and the same shall not be subject to the disposal of her husband nor liable for his debts. (Lewis 1& 2)

Because Mary Monson is taking advantage of this law she ultimately must suffer. She cannot be rewarded the way Mabel Dunham is at the end of The Pathfinder, or the way Eve Effingham is at the end of Home As Found because unlike these two heroines, Mary does not know her place. Instead of marrying the husband of her choice, Mary is labeled insane. This is a surprising end for Mary given Cooper’s early description of her calm and collectedness when faced with criminal charges for both arson and murder, as well as her well-thought-out plans for her defense. Throwing the insanity tag on her seems to be a deficiency in Cooper’s writing. It is almost as if he did not know how to deal with this complex character once he constructed her:

The novel founders on the character of Mary Monson. More than halfway through the book, Mary has the reader's sympathy. Cooper’s dilemma, then, is that having established Mary as a lady secure in her place and possessing those qualities he and his protagonist Thomas Dunscomb respect, he must now reveal her as
one seduced by the new ideas current in the land. She becomes in Dunscomb's analysis of her character and actions an example of a very real and present danger to society. (Darnell 116)

Readers get the impression that Cooper proceeded to write the novel without having its course mapped out. As his social criticism expanded his attitude towards Mary Monson begins to change.

It is clear that at the beginning of the novel Cooper is very sympathetic towards her. The descriptions of her grace and beauty lead one to believe she will be a role model for readers in the same way Mabel Dunham and Eve Effingham are in The Pathfinder and Home As Found respectively. When Mary is described amidst the people of Bibery, it is clear she holds a higher social status than any of those around her:

...All eyes were bent on the person of one particular female...this person belonged to a class every way superior to that of even the highest of those who pressed around the table. The face was concealed in a handkerchief, but the form was not only youthful but also highly attractive. Small, delicate hands and feet could be seen; such hands and feet as we are all accustomed to see in an American girl who has been delicately brought up. (Ways 22)

In addition to being of the genteel class that Cooper not only admired but also felt was necessary to lead by example, Mary Monson has an irresistible air
about her. The combination of her mysterious past and the heinous crimes with which she is charged draws the attention of the town to her:

It has already been said that this strange girl, extraordinary by her situation as a person accused of crimes so heinous, and perhaps still more so by her manner of bearing up against the terrors and mortifications of her condition, as well as by the mystery which so completely veiled her past life, was not a beauty, in the common acceptation of the term. Nevertheless, not one female in ten thousand would sooner ensnare the heart of a youth, by means of her personal attraction alone. It was not regularity of features, nor brilliancy of complexion, nor lustre of the eyes, nor any of the more ordinary charms, that gave her this power, but an indescribable union of feminine traits, in which intellectual gifts, spirit, tenderness, and modesty were so singularly blended, as to leave it questionable which had the advantage. (*Ways* 70)

Mary uses this advantage to help her cause throughout her confinement. In fact, her life seems to change so little, and she is so content, that one would not realize she is incarcerated without being told. "The prisoner was truly the most incomprehensible being he [Dunscomb] had ever met with. Notwithstanding the fearful nature of the charges against her – charges that might well have given great uneasiness to the finest man – she actually seemed in love with her prison" (*Ways* 78). Of course she has reason to love her prison. It allows her to keep out of the
public eye, a welcome benefit for a woman of fortune (twenty-five thousand pounds a year) who does not want her ex-husband to find her. It is much easier for Mary to take advantage of the new laws in New York without him hounding her for money.

A second reason for Mary's seeming love for her prison is her absolute knowledge of her innocence. She knows she has not committed the crimes she is charged with and is absolutely sure the jury must acquit her of them. Her confidence is noted and spoken of by her lawyers:

"...No client ever gave counsel less trouble than Mary Monson in that respect. To me, Timms, she does not appear to have any concern for the result."

"Supreme innocence, or a well-practiced experience. I have defended many a person whom I knew to be guilty, and two or three whom I believed to be innocent; but never before had as cool a client as this!"

And very true was this. Even the announcement of the presentment of the grand jury appeared to give Mary Monson no great alarm. Perhaps she anticipated it from the first, and had prepared herself for the event, by an exercise of firmness little common to her sex until the moment of extreme trial, when their courage would seem to rise with the occasion. (Ways 97)

Mary certainly does rise to the occasion in terms of her own defense. She is determined not only to win her case, but to win it on her own terms. Every time an
opportunity to avoid conviction and the inevitable sentence of execution arises she will not take it because each of them will leave her name tainted with the suspicion of guilt. For Mary, acquittal is not enough. She must clear herself of all suspicion as well. She has too much pride and is too well bred to accept anything less.

Even when it comes to something as simple as giving up her alias (Mary Monson is really Madame de Larocheforte by marriage) she is adamant in her reluctance to give the jury her real name. "She must be made to feel the necessity of fortifying us on that particular point, else it will go far towards convicting her, Jurors do not like aliases." "She knows this already, for I have laid the matter before her, again and again. Nothing seems to move her, however; and as to apprehension, she appears to be above all fear" (Ways 155). Mary's feeling is that she is charged and held as Mary Monson; therefore, she will be tried and acquitted as Mary Monson. Furthermore, she will do it all her own way. She will not rely on her wealth, her beauty, or her grace and refinement. "What makes the matter more provoking, Mary Monson might have had it all her own way, if she had been so minded; for at first, she was popularity itself with all the neighbors. Folks nat'rally like beauty and elegance, and youth; and Mary has enough of each to make friends anywhere" (Ways 158). Mary, however, does not want to win her case by charming the community and the jury; to do so would leave traces of suspicion with at least some of the inhabitants of Bibery. She wants complete and absolute belief in her innocence.
This conviction of will causes her to refuse all other means of escape that arise. When Mr. Dunscomb alerts Mary that the nephew and sole heir to Peter Goodwin will drop the charges against her if she agrees to pay him five thousand dollars in gold eagles or half-eagles Mary refuses, not because it is a large sum to raise in a short period of time, but because of the damaging effect it would have on her reputation:

"As respects the money, Mr. Dunscomb," returned the fair prisoner, in the most easy and natural manner, "that need give us no concern. By sending a confidential messenger to town...it would it would be very easy to have five hundred eagles or a thousand half-eagles here, by breakfast-time tomorrow. What I dislike is the injustice of the thing, I have never touched a cent of poor Mrs. Goodwin's hoard; and it would be false to admit that I am returning that which I never received." (Ways 196)

Later in the novel it is revealed that Mary Monson has in her possession a set of keys to the jail in which he is held. Although she has used them several times to go out and meet with various people, she will not use them for the purpose of flight, even when the plight of her criminal case looks grim:

"My situation is most extraordinary, Anna," she said; "It proves almost too much for my strength! This has been a terrible day, calm as I may have appeared; and I fear that the morrow will be still harder to be borne. There is an expression about the eyes of that
man Williams that both alarms and disgusts me. I am to expect in him a most fiery foe."

"Why, then, do you not escape from scenes for which you are so unsuited, and leave this saucy Williams to himself, and his schemes of plunder?"

"That would not do. Several sufficient reasons exist for remaining. Were I to avail myself of the use of the keys I possess, and quit the gaol not to return, good Mrs. Gott and her husband would probably be ruined.

...As Mary Monson, I am indicted for these grievous crimes; as Mary Monson will I be acquitted of them. I feel an affection for the character, and shall not degrade it by any act as base as that of flight.” (Ways 257)

Instead of flight or purchasing her freedom, Mary Monson enacts another plan to assure acquittal. She uses Timms, her junior counsel, to spread stories about her. The first reveals a part of her personal past that she has run away from the Frenchman she married. The second, in Mary's own words, is:

"Your agent has set foot a story that I belong to a gang of wretches who are combined to prey on society; and that, in this character, I came into Duke's to carry out one of its nefarious schemes?"
"That is the substance of the rumour we have started at your own desire; though I could wish it were not quite so strong, and that there were more time for the reaction."

"The strength of the rumour is its great merit; and, as for time, we have abundance for our purposes. Reaction is the great power of popularity, as I have heard again and again. It is always the most effective, too, at the turn of the tide. Let the public once get possessed with the notion that a rumour so injurious has been in circulation at the expense of one in my cruel condition, and the current of feeling will set the other way in a torrent that nothing can arrest." (Ways 263)

The importance of Mary's plan is twofold. First, it shows her intelligence and her knowledge of her situation. She is smart enough to know how to fight for her own freedom, even when she has to play by the rules of an unfamiliar small town. Second, and more important, it shows the kind of power Cooper is willing to grant his female characters when they are in an enclosed space. Mary enacts this plan, which not only uses her attorney in the way she wants, but also manipulates the entire town of Bibery, and all of Duke's County, while in her prison cell. In addition, the plan is carried out exactly as per her instructions regardless of anyone's apprehensions about it, including her own well-established male counsel:

Timms grew frightened at the success of his client's scheme, and felt the necessity of commencing the reaction at once, if the last were to
have time in which to produce its effect. He had been warmly opposed to the project in the commencement, and had strenuously resisted its adoption; but Mary Monson would not listen to his objections. She even threatened to employ another, should he fail her. The conceit seemed to have taken a strong hold on her fancy; and all the willfulness of her character had come in aid of this strange scheme. (Ways 272)

Mary's control over her situation and her confidence in her acquittal are absolute and complete. In her mind there is no way the jury can find her guilty because there is not enough evidence against her. She is doubly satisfied because she has gone about her defense in her own way; the truth will set her free, not money, influence or any other agent outside of her control:

"I shall owe my triumph, not to money, my dear girls,...not to friends, nor to a great array of counsel; but to truth. I did not commit these crimes; and on the testimony of the state alone, with scarcely any of my own, the jury will have to say as much. No stain will rest on my character, and I can meet my friends with the unclouded brow of innocence. This is a very precious moment to me; I would not part with it for all the honours that riches and rank can bestow." (Ways 291)

Unfortunately for Mary Monson the only thing standing in the way of her acquittal is Cooper's criticism of the jury system in America, especially the
corruption due to small town provincialism. In order for Cooper to make his point, the jury must find Mary Monson guilty, even in the light of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Once Cooper is through with his attack, however, the main story continues and Mary is acquitted of all charges when it is revealed that Peter Goodwin is still alive and thus Mary Monson could not have murdered him. It is also revealed that Peter Goodwin's wife died when the house accidentally caught fire, and that it was Mrs. Burton, a neighbor of the Goodwins, who took Mrs. Goodwin's stocking full of gold.

Mary's acquittal is not the end of her story, though. It is also not the end of Cooper's use of her for his social criticism. While Mary Monson is building the case for her innocence and controlling her own fate from within her jail cell, Cooper is building his own case against women's rights with Mary Monson at the heart of it. His position culminates when he labels Mary insane because of her views on women's rights, but he begins it much earlier in the novel.

The first glimpse of Cooper's opinion is given in an exchange between Jack Wilmington, Thomas Dunscomb's nephew, and Mrs. Gott. The two minor characters discuss the changing attitude towards women's rights in America:

"Justice is intended to do that which is equitable, and it is not fair to assume that women are always right, and men always wrong. I know my uncle thinks that not only the decisions of late years, but the laws, have lost sight of the wisdom of the past, and are gradually
placing women above the men, making her instead of him the head of the family."

"Well, Mr. Wilmington, and isn't that quite right?" demanded Mrs. Gott, with a good-natured nod.

"My uncle thinks it very wrong, and that by a mistaken gallantry the peace of families is undermined and their discipline destroyed; as, in punishment, by a false philanthropy rogues are petted at the expense of honest folk. Such are the opinions of Mr. Thomas Dunscomb, at least." (Ways 103)

If the opinions of Thomas Dunscomb are the same as those of Cooper, as Darnell claims, it can be said that by taking authority away from men, the moral order of society is destroyed. The message given is that when making laws for the future, it is essential to study the wisdom of the past. That wisdom has always placed men, not women, in positions of power.

Mrs. Gott attempts to make the argument that Thomas Dunscomb is simply an old man too set in his ways, like Cooper was by the time he wrote The Ways of the Hour. "Mr. Dunscomb, like most elderly persons, has little taste for change" (Ways 129). Jack Wilmington's response on behalf of Mr. Dunscomb is a clear all-out attack on New York's Married Women's Property Act:

It is not that. He thinks that minds of an ordinary stamp are running away with the conceit that they are on the road of progress; and that most of our recent improvements, as they are called, are marked by
empiricism. This 'tea-cup law,' as he terms it, will set the women above their husbands, and create two sets of interest where there ought to be but one. (Ways 129)

There is nothing subtle about Cooper's opinions. He obviously feels a husband and his interests must be at the head of the family. A woman who enters into the sacred bonds of matrimony must know and accept her role. Since she has chosen to break those bonds, Mary Monson must be punished. "In effect Cooper has again written a novel about knowing one's place. Mary Monson, her gentility, cultivation, and wealth notwithstanding, has, by not honoring her commitments in the matrimonial hierarchy, demonstrated a remarkable disregard of propriety and morality" (Darnell 117).

In order to combat the independent views of Mary Monson, Cooper relies on one of his favored literary devices; he introduces into the novel a foil for his heroine. Unlike previous foils like Dew-in-June for Mabel Dunham and Miss Ring for Eve Effingham, both of whom serve to strengthen the heroines' position in their respective novels, this time Cooper sympathizes with the foil. As Anne House puts it:

Almost halfway through the novel, a douce heroine is brought to the foreground so that she can be contrasted with Mary. This girl, Anna, replaces in the action an attractive and outspoken character (the lawyer's niece) Cooper had carefully established in the opening scenes. The reason for the substitution is obvious; the niece, who
plunges into an argument about constitutional law, is too much like Mary. Anna, by contrast, is a perfect foil. She assures her fiancé that if she had money (she has none), she would "pour all into his lap, and then come and ask of him as much as was necessary"; the lovers agree that women should content themselves with "accomplishments, and small talk, and making preserves, and dancing, and even poetry and religion"; they scorn women who think they are intelligent and who desert their husbands. (Americans 36-37)

Cooper had to introduce this character because "Cooper saw that Mary could be made a champion of women's rights" (Americans 36).

Anna Updyke represents the ideal woman in Cooper's vision for the perfect America. Readers do not immediately embrace her, though, because Mary Monson is too far entrenched in the readers' sympathy. Cooper also seems to outwit himself by continuing to write speeches for Mary Monson that make too much sense. As he is trying to introduce and build up Anna Updyke, he also continues to strengthen Mary's position with readers. One speech in particular occurs when Mary tries to convince Anna of the injustices men have always inflicted on women:

"I know not what may be the particular notions of Miss Updyke...but I can feel my own longings. They are all for independence. Men have not dealt fairly by women. Possessing the power, they have made all the laws, fashioned all the opinions of the world, in their own favor. Let a woman err, and she can never rise from her fall;
while men live with impunity in the midst of their guilt. If a woman think differently from those around her, she is expected to conceal her opinion, in order to receive those of her masters. Even in the worship of God, the highest and most precious of all our duties, she is expected to play a secondary part, and act as if the Christian faith favored the sentiment of another, which teaches that women have no souls." (Ways 198)

Cooper is making the same argument through Mary Monson that Nathaniel Hawthorne would make one year later through Hester Prynne in The Scarlet Letter.

Having placed Mary Monson so high in the readers' esteem, there are few options left for Cooper but to tear her down. The only credible one is to point out that her ideas and notions come from a diseased mind, something he begins to do during Mary's trial. "As the trial begins and Cooper becomes increasingly interested in his attack on feminism, he starts to build a case against Mary. First, Mary's attorney begins to suspect that she is guilty..." (House 36). In Dunscomb's own words, "...I am afraid that she has done those deeds, terrible as they are! ...I see no safety for her except in the plea of insanity. I am in hopes that something may be made out in that respect" (Ways 227-28).

This seed that Cooper sows at the beginning of the trial reaches full bloom once it ends. The woman who controlled her own defense and destiny from within her prison cell is labeled insane when she tries to maintain that same power in a social space. Her ideas would take too much power out of male hands, something
Cooper can never allow. In order to achieve his ends Cooper again contrasts the view of Mary Monson, now using the name Mildred Millington, and Anna Updyke:

"Do not marry Anna; take my advice, and never marry. Matrimony is unsuited to ladies."

"How long have you been of this opinion, dear mamma?"
asked the young girl smiling.

"Just as long as I have been made to feel how it crushes a woman's independence, and how completely it gives her a master, and how very, very humiliating and depressing is the bondage it inflicts. Do you not feel the force of my reasons?"

"I confess I do not," answered Anna, in a subdued, yet clear and distinct voice. "I see nothing humiliating or depressing in a woman's submission to her husband. It is the law of nature, and why should we wish to alter it?"

"...My dear, you little understand what matrimony is, or how much humiliation is required of us women to become wives, or you would never think of marrying." (Ways 313-14)

Although to a modern reader Mary Monson makes a strong and valid argument, Cooper is setting her up for a fall. As the two women continue their conversation Mary tries to stress the importance of independence and rights to Anna, but Anna will have none of it. She believes it is natural for a woman to play the role of the dutiful wife. Anna's view is ultimately shown, in the novel, to be right and proper.
As Anne House points out, "Cooper joined other novelists in assuring women that powerlessness was power" (Americans 27).

The final blow to Mary Monson's credibility is struck by Cooper's spokesman Thomas Dunscomb when Dunscomb endorses all of Anna's sentiments:

"Anna, my love, Jack is a lucky fellow – far luckier than he deserves to be. You carry the right sentiment into wedlock. It is the right of the husband to be the head of his family; and the wife who resists his authority is neither prudent nor a Christian. He may abuse it, it is true; but, even then, so long as criminality is escaped, it were better to submit. I approve of every word you uttered, dear, and thank you for it all in my nephew's name." (Ways 317)

Anna knows her place and thus is rewarded. She will marry Jack Wilmington, the man of her choice. The young couple will presumably live happily ever after.

Mary Monson, on the other hand, has already broken the bonds of marriage and voiced strong opinions against the institution. At the end of her discussion with both Anna Updyke and Thomas Dunscomb on the subject, Mary's insanity is revealed:

Dunscomb turned, astonished, to his companion, and stared her in the face. Never was the countenance more lovely to the cursory glance, the eye brighter, the cheek with a richer glow on it, or the whole air, mien and attitude more replete with womanly loveliness and womanly graces; but the observant eye of the lawyer
penetrated beyond all these, and detected the unhappy spirit which had gained possession of a tenement so lovely. The expression of the countenance denoted the very triumph of cunning. We pretend not to a knowledge of the arcana of nature, to be able to detect the manner in which the moving principles prompt to good or evil, but we must reject all sacred history, and no small portion of profane, not to believe that agencies exist that are not visible to our ordinary senses; and that our boasted reason, when abandoned to its own support, becomes the victim of those that are malign. We care not by what names these agents are called, imps, demons, evil spirits, or evil passions; but his we do know, let him beware who submits to their control. Better, far better, were it that such an one had never been born!

Three days later Mildred Millington was in a state that left not doubt of her infirmity. The lucid intervals were long, however, and at such times her mind seemed clear enough on all subjects but one. Divorce was her “ruling passion,” and, in order to effect her purpose, all the extraordinary ingenuity of a most fertile mind was put in requisition. (Ways 320)

It is Mary’s desire and her attempts to spread her ideas that are her greatest crimes. Had she kept these notions to herself, or only uttered them in private, Cooper could have allowed a better ending for her. Instead, he had to discredit and humiliate her
for her attempt to usurp power from the American patriarchy. He does leave some hope for Mary Monson/Mildred Millington at the end of the novel, but only when she follows his rules for the ideal American society:

Humility was, indeed, a hard lesson for Mildred Millington to study. Her whole life had been in direct opposition to its precepts, and the great failing of her mind had a strong leaning to a love of power. Nevertheless, there is a still, searching process of correcting, so interwoven with the law of the New Testament, as to be irresistible when brought to aid us, in the manner prescribed by its own theory. No one knew this better than Dunscomb; and he so directed the reading, thoughts and feelings of his interesting charge, as to produce an early and a very sensible change on her character. The tendency to insanity is still there, and probably will ever remain; for it is not so much the consequence of any physical derangement as of organization; but it already promises to be so far controlled, as to leave its unhappy subject, generally rational, and, for most of her time, reasonably satisfied. (Ways 331)

Mary’s fate may seem overly harsh for a character whose worst transgression is standing firm in her convictions and fighting for her legal rights. But it is necessary for Cooper to make an example of her since his goal was to stifle the new laws in America granting women more rights and more power. In a sense
the destruction of Mary's mind caused by her convictions is symbolic of Cooper's belief that "the ways of the hour" would destroy American society.
Chapter 5

The Role of Cooper’s Female Characters & the Relevance of Cooper’s Work Today

James Fenimore Cooper lived during a time of great change in America. Unfortunately for him much of that change took place in the later years of his life. The landed genteel class of his youth and early adulthood, the group of which Cooper counted himself a member, was giving way to a new urban aristocracy centered around manufacturing. The rigid social structure Cooper envisioned and favored for America began to erode before his very eyes. Suddenly upstarts with no family history or tradition were seizing political power. In addition to this shift in political power, with the passing of the Married Women’s Property Act of New York State 1849, the clearly defined gender roles assigned to men and women began to blur. Many of Cooper’s novels of manners and social class were written as a reaction to these changes.

In novels such as The Pathfinder, Homeward Bound, Home as Found, and The Ways of the Hour Cooper gives characters power and status according to their social class and their gender. The rules Cooper lays out for the characters in these novels are simple. Any character who accepts his or her position and fulfills his or her assigned role is rewarded. Any character who tries to improve his or her social status or tries to assume more power or freedom than his or her role allows is punished for his or her transgressions. The basis for Cooper’s rules in each of these novels is Cooper’s own vision for an ideal American society. In Cooper’s mind the ideal society for America was a mix of the old world tradition of a genteel class
setting the example for the masses mixed with the rights guaranteed by America’s founding fathers in *The Declaration of Independence* and *The Constitution of the United States*.

These rules are especially rigid for Cooper’s female characters. In his novels Cooper only grants power to women under specific circumstances, such as life-or-death situations, and in very specific places, all of which are out of the public eye, usually either an enclosed domestic space like the kitchen or an upstairs parlor, or a frontier space that is outside of society’s control. Social spaces, especially those in plain public view are strictly the domain of men. If a woman were granted power in such spaces it would upset what Cooper saw as the natural order, a strictly patriarchal society.

It is for this reason that Cooper’s novels of manners and social class remain relevant in contemporary American society. Many of the same restrictions Cooper placed on his female characters in *The Pathfinder*, *Homeward Bound*, *Home as Found*, and *The Ways of the Hour* still exist in America. Many women face a constant struggle to gain equality in the workplace, the government, and on the playing field. Although there has been a great deal of progress since Cooper’s lifetime through such laws as the Nineteenth Amendment to *The Constitution*, the failed Equal Rights Amendment of 1972, and *Title IX*, there is still a wide gap between things such as salaries and opportunities for women as compared to those of their male counterparts in contemporary American society.
In *The Pathfinder* Cooper stresses two main points. First, there are severe consequences for characters who attempt to cross social classes through marriage. Characters who attempt to rise will never be accepted by those already in that higher class, and characters who try to marry below their class can only damage, if not destroy their reputations. Second, female characters may have power, but only in either life-and-death situations, or in small, enclosed spaces where they cannot usurp the power of men in any way. This is best illustrated through the actions, decisions, and adventures of Mabel Dunham.

Throughout the novel Mabel accepts her role as a sergeant’s daughter. Early in the novel she realizes that she is not a lady and therefore can never become an officer’s wife even though lieutenant Muir makes it known that he intends to marry Mabel Dunham. This union would be disastrous because the wives of the other officers in the garrison could never accept Mabel as their equal. Similarly, Mabel must also avoid marrying Natty Bumppo because he is both socially and intellectually inferior to her. If the two were to marry it would be the death of Mabel’s intellect and she would inevitably come to despise her husband.

Near the end of *The Pathfinder* Mabel Dunham successfully defends a small blockhouse on a remote island, as well as her own life, against a group of bloodthirsty Tuscarora Indians. Her cool use of intellect and the limited weapons of defense at her disposal hold her enemies at bay through a long and terrible night. She is in control of the situation and her own fate for much of the novel’s climactic scene, but only until Natty Bumppo and a small band of British soldiers return to the
island after a successful raiding mission. Once the men arrive Mabel falls back into a more traditional female role, that of caregiver for her wounded father. Control of the island and the fate of the surviving Tuscaroras rests with Natty Bumppo and the British officers. Mabel is unable to maintain her power and control over the blockhouse and her own situation because to do so would upset and undermine Cooper’s patriarchal model. Mabel’s submission to the will of the men in the novel is ultimately rewarded, however. Like all submissive heroines in Cooper’s novels of manners and social class, she is allowed to marry the man of her choice, in this case Jasper Western.

In *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, commonly referred to as either the Home novels of the Effingham novels, Cooper again addresses the issue of when and where a female character is allowed to have power and control situations. Unlike *The Pathfinder* which is set entirely on the American frontier, the Home novels are set predominantly in society. Cooper uses them to show in what situations and under what circumstances female characters may have power in social spaces. Although both of the Home novels are considered by scholars to be among the worst Cooper ever produced, these novels give a tremendous insight into Cooper’s attitude about which aspects of American society were the domain of women and which were clearly the domain of men.

Throughout the Home novels Cooper focuses on which actions are appropriate and which are inappropriate for the genteel class in America. The protagonists of the novels, Eve Effingham, her father Edward Effingham, and his
cousin John Effingham, represent Cooper’s ideal genteel family. They are the basis of comparison for all other characters. True gentlemen and ladies are shown nothing but respect, while those pretending to be gentlemen and ladies are the object of ridicule and scorn. A comparison of Eve Effingham with her father and her uncle shows how different the power Cooper granted to men in social spaces is from that which he granted to women.

For example, throughout the sea voyage from England to America in *Homeward Bound* Eve represents the ideal lady. She is beautiful, educated, and perhaps most importantly dutiful to her father and her cousin. Her opinions as well as her convictions are strong, but they are also mirrors of Edward’s and John’s. The only difference is that Eve is more rational than her father’s cousin and slightly more moderate than both male protagonists. Were Eve's ideas and beliefs radically different from either her father’s or his cousin’s, Cooper would never allow her to express them rationally. Again, to do so would usurp power from his male characters and upset the patriarchal system Cooper believed in. Instead of giving Eve Effingham any real power or control Cooper only allows her to manipulate her father and slightly control his actions in very minor and unimportant incidents. For example, when Edward Effingham intends to confront Steadfast Dodge for a fairly minor transgression, Eve convinces her father to leave well enough alone because the man is beneath him.
In the second Home novel, *Home as Found*, the difference between men’s and women’s power in social spaces is more pronounced. Two key scenes, the ball in New York City, and the land dispute in Templeton illustrate Cooper’s views.

Early in the novel, as the protagonists are newly arrived in America after a twelve year absence from their native country there are many visits to make and social gatherings to attend. In these early scenes Eve Effingham proves to be much more polished and refined than her peers, none of whom had the benefit of a European education. Throughout the first quarter of the novel Eve controls who the Effinghams visit, how long they remain in each house and who accompanies them as they call on their former neighbors. She also shows a great deal of confidence and self-sufficiency at Mrs. Houston’s ball. Rather than rely on a gentleman to escort her from room to room, Eve walks alone. Her boldness is a sharp contrast to the other young ladies present, all of whom pale in comparison to Eve’s beauty, charm and intelligence. It is important to realize, however, that these situations that Eve controls are of no real consequence when compared to those controlled by Edward and John Effingham.

The men’s show of power appears much later in the novel when the ownership of a piece of land called The Point comes into question. The land indisputably belongs to Edward Effingham, but the people of Templeton are under the impression that Mr. Effingham’s father gave the land to the town to make it an area open to the public. By producing his father’s will and other official documents Mr. Effingham shows he is the rightful owner of the land. Throughout this very
public dispute it is the male protagonists who are in control of the situation. They exert their political and financial power to defeat the claims of an entire town.

By contrasting these two scenes of power and control Cooper expresses his belief that it is men who must control important situations and disputes. Edward and John Effingham battle with an entire town in the courts over land ownership, something especially important given Cooper's desire to maintain a landed genteel class in America. Eve Effingham controls social calls on close friends and her own actions at a social ball, all of which occur in very small, enclosed spaces. Clearly the power and control Cooper gives Eve is no threat to a male dominated society.

Cooper's last novel is by far his harshest criticism of American society. The title, The Ways of the Hour, is in itself a reference to the many new laws and customs that swept through America near the end of Cooper's life, laws and customs that Cooper felt would ruin America's moral fabric. The chief offender as far as Cooper was concerned were laws that granted women the right to divorce their husbands and the law that allowed a married woman to keep her own property. Prior to 1849 a married woman had to forfeit any property, money and valuables to her husband.

The ambivalent attitude Cooper held against these laws is best expressed through the novel's heroine, Mary Monson, and her foil, Anna Updyke. As these two women interact with one another it is plain to see that they have very different ideas about whether a wife should withhold money from her husband or give it all to him freely. Anna Updyke, who forcefully maintains that she would gladly give
everything she owned, if she had anything of value to give, to her husband. She
even goes so far as to say she would then ask her husband for use of that which she
had just given him. Mary Monson, on the other hand, preaches that a woman should
keep her property and rely on herself, rather than become totally dependent on her
husband.

Cooper's opinion of which character has the appropriate ideas is clearly
expressed by either the rewards or the consequences he gives each of these
characters. Anna Updyke is rewarded. She marries the man she loves, John
Wilmeter, and lives happily ever after. Mary Monson must suffer the consequences
for her beliefs. By the end of the novel, although she has been acquitted of the
murder and arson charges she faced, it is revealed that Mary Monson suffers from
insanity.

The Ways of the Hour, like The Pathfinder, Homeward Bound, and Home as
Found, is another example of the way Cooper grants power to female characters
under certain circumstances and in certain spaces. Mary Monson is accused of both
murder and arson. Throughout the course of her incarceration and trial she is able to
manipulate her lawyers and the entire town of Biberry from her jail cell. Mary
controls every aspect of her defense. Her pleas, her refusal to 'buy-off' the
prosecution, and even the rumors that are spread throughout the county about her
are all orchestrated from within this tiny enclosed space. It is only when she is
acquitted of all crimes, leaves the jail and tries to spread her ideas about women's
rights in the public eye that she is declared insane. As long as nobody in Biberry
knows she has power, Cooper allows her to have it and exercise it. Once she is seen in the social space and her power exposed to public view, Cooper strips it from her. Like Mabel Dunham and Eve Effingham before her, Mary Monson is not allowed to usurp the power of men and upset the patriarchal system.

It is easy for contemporary readers to criticize the views Cooper expresses in *The Pathfinder*, *Homeward Bound*, *Home as Found*, and *The Ways of the Hour*. By today's standards they are certainly demeaning to women and go against every bit of progress women's rights crusaders like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton ever fought for. But to read these novels and judge them according to contemporary thought about women's rights and the role of women in American society is more than a little unfair to James Fenimore Cooper. At the time he was writing these novels, he was a man living through a time of change, and he was not ready for most of those changes. His era of the landed gentleman was coming to an end much too quickly for him to deal with it effectively. Cooper was merely doing what most people would naturally do, even if they are loathe to admit it. He was trying desperately to cling to his values and beliefs, and as an author he was trying to use his craft to convince people he was right.

Ironically, these novels that Cooper wrote to criticize and stifle the changes in American society he did not agree with are nearly perfect agents to help further the very changes he opposed. When the novels are studied through a contemporary lens it is easy to see how they could be used to show just how wide the gender gap remains. Even the most cursory study of contemporary American society reveals
how the power of women is still limited more than one hundred and fifty years after Cooper's death.

In the history of the United States government we have had forty-three presidents, heading the executive branch. Every one of them has been a man. At the time of this writing, in the legislative branch of government that makes our laws, only fourteen of our one hundred senators are women. In the House of Representatives women only account for just over fifteen percent of our representatives. Of the nine members of our judicial branch, only two women serve as Supreme Court Justices. Considering that approximately fifty-one percent of the population is female this imbalance of power in the federal government is staggering.

The picture in the corporate world is not much brighter. In a 2003 census of Fortune Five Hundred companies Catalyst research found that:

Women's access to boardrooms in U. S. companies has lagged far behind their increasing roles in the economy as consumers, employees, investors and business owners. Women outnumber men in the population, account for almost half of the workforce and are responsible for over 80 percent of all purchases of goods and services. They make up over 45 percent of all investors, and they own over 10 million companies, which account for over 45 percent of all U. S. firms. Yet, the boardrooms of many companies remain off limits to women. (Flynn 32)
The percentages are staggering. Even though nearly half of all workers in America are women, "Catalyst's Census of the Fortune 500 shows that women hold 13.6 percent of all board seats, and that 10.8 percent of these companies have no female directors" (Flynn 32).

Even though there has been a great deal of progress for women's rights over the last hundred and fifty years, clearly there is need for more progress. Throughout history authors have often been catalysts for change. Charles Dickens is credited for shedding light on the plight of child laborers with his novel, *Oliver Twist*. Many, including then President Abraham Lincoln, say Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* caused the United States Civil War. James Fenimore Cooper's novels of manners and social class could easily join these ranks and become novels to help further the feminist cause.
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