

INTRODUCTION

The present study is an inventory of the facsimilies of the literary manuscripts of James Fenimore Cooper thus far collected at Clark University in preparation for a definitive edition of Cooper's literary works. The manuscripts described here presumably represent the major private and institutional collections. Because Cooper's manuscripts are widely dispersed, the collection is not yet complete. Some manuscripts are complete and in good condition. Others have been clipped into fragments. Still others are either unlocated or destroyed. Although the inventory is perhaps not more than ninety percent complete, it can serve as a preliminary assessment of extant manuscript materials and as an indication of other manuscripts that may survive.

The inventory is designed for use in preparation for textual work on the definitive edition. The selection of a copy-text is of primary concern to an editor establishing a definitive text. The copy-text, especially for a nineteenth-century literary work, is, in general, the final manuscript copy or manuscript copy corrected by the author. The editor should, however, make every effort to locate all manuscripts which antedate the earliest published text. He cannot proceed until he has conducted surveys and collected and inventoried all available literary manuscripts, corrected proofs, and author's revisions of the work he is editing.

The location and physical condition of Cooper manuscripts have been governed by a variety of circumstances. Lack of understanding by

nineteenth-century Americans of the scholarly value of manuscript material militated against any effective effort at systematic collection. Neither Cooper nor his immediate family was especially concerned to preserve or collect his manuscripts. Attempting to comply with Cooper's deathbed request that his manuscripts be sequestered, his immediate family permitted many manuscripts to be scattered. Many manuscripts were apparently left in the hands of publishers and either given away or sold publicly or privately after their estates were broken up. Cooper's grandson, James Fenimore Cooper, began to assemble the novelist's manuscripts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the Yale University Library, the Barrett Collection of the University of Virginia, and Cooper scholars such as James F. Beard have continued these efforts.

The scattered and fragmentary condition of the manuscripts has resulted from common practices of nineteenth-century manuscript collectors. During Cooper's lifetime, the techniques of manuscript preservation were not developed or orderly; and manuscripts, when they were valued at all, were likely to be valued as souvenirs. In a letter to Aaron Vail, charge d'affaires of the United States at London from 1832 to 1836, Cooper wrote in reply to Vail's request for an autograph for the Princess Victoria: "Nearly all of my manuscripts have been destroyed, having little value . . .".¹

The early manuscripts--that from The Spy (1821), The Pioneers (1823),

¹James Franklin Beard, ed., The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), III, p. 144.

The Pilot (1824), Lionel Lincoln (1825) and The Last of the Mohicans (1826) --were presumably burned by Cooper. The survival of large portions of Precaution (1820), Cooper's earliest book, is attributable to publisher A. T. Goodrich, who gave the material to the New-York Historical Society, where it remains.

After the successful publication of The Spy (1821), Cooper's literary fame skyrocketed in Europe as well as in the United States. His tales of the American wilderness and of the sea were immensely popular. On March 26, 1827, Cooper wrote to Mrs. Peter Augustus Jay: "There is a perfect mania for any thing that can in any way pretend to literature, and, as you may gather from my letters I am not entirely overlooked . . . The people seem to think it marvellous that an American can write - I do firmly believe that nine tenths of the french reading world are ignorant that a book was ever made in America, except by Dr. Franklin and M. Cooper, Americain, as they call me."² During his seven-year sojourn in Europe, beginning in 1826, Cooper was something of a celebrity, especially in French and Italian society. The French were fascinated with this American artist. He was invited to all types of social events and besieged with requests, including countless demands for autographs.

The great vogue of autograph collecting--an early nineteenth-century phenomenon--was more advanced in Europe than in the United States. European enthusiasm for Cooper was reflected in the volume of autograph requests, which poured in from all over and from people of all social classes. Thus,

²Ibid., I, p. 209.

while in France, Cooper gave some thought (apparently for the first time) to the preservation of his manuscripts, as souvenirs or items for the autograph collectors.³ The hungry collectors wanted both unique and characteristic pieces, and Cooper dutifully yielded, often with a holograph fragment from a published work which some collectors preferred.⁴ Cooper's practice of clipping or scissoring manuscripts for collectors' demands explains the fragmentary condition of The Water-Witch (1830), The Bravo (1831), The Headsman (1833) and The Oak Openings (1848). After Cooper's death, some members of the family also distributed holograph samples to interested collectors.

Clearly, a major agent in the preservation of Cooper's manuscripts was the nineteenth-century collector. The collectors dramatically demonstrated to Cooper that his manuscripts were not worthless. Despite the damage rendered to the material--the scissoring or scattering of manuscripts --"the nineteenth-century collector more than compensated by preserving manuscripts which otherwise would almost surely have been destroyed."⁵

It was, however, Cooper's chief English publisher, Richard Bentley, who was uniquely instrumental in the preservation of manuscript copy. During the nineteenth century, the conventional interpretation of British copyright law held that priority of publication established copyright. In other words, if a work were published first in Great Britain, the publisher

³James F. Beard, "James Fenimore Cooper Aids the Collectors," Manuscripts, VI (Fall, 1953), p. 22.

⁴Ibid., p. 23.

⁵Ibid., p. 26.

held the copyright whether or not the author was British. Prompted by this arrangement, the possession of manuscript copy, or at least advance sheets, became useful as a device by which the English publisher could establish his claims. At Bentley's request, presumably to assist the publisher in his copyright claim, Cooper supplied the English publisher with manuscripts or corrected manuscript copies. Between 1838 and the mid-1840s, Cooper sent manuscripts to Bentley, who carefully preserved most of this material. This arrangement helps to explain the almost complete state of the manuscripts of Home as Found (1838), Homeward Bound (1838), The Pathfinder (1840), Mercedes of Castile (1841), The Deerslayer (1841) and The Two Admirals (1842).

The format of this inventory is determined by the needs of textual specialists. Each entry serves as a detailed, analytical record of the manuscripts in whole or in part. The listing of books is chronological. In general, each manuscript segment is listed according to the order of its appearance in the printed text. When more than one manuscript draft is preserved, the listings for a particular book might include, respectively: pre-copy-text, manuscript copy classified as provisional draft material; final or semi-final manuscript copy in Cooper's hand; amanuensis copy corrected by Cooper; holograph of Cooper's preface to a later edition; and interleaved copy corrected by Cooper for a later edition. This arrangement provides a genetic sequence of evolution of manuscript drafts leading to the eclectic text. Manuscripts of articles, reviews, etc., are similarly listed in a separate section that is at the end of the works.

"Constants" for each manuscript or state of a particular work--data which remain unchanged for each subsequent listing--appear immediately after the title. This information includes: basic publishing data relating to the first printing; size of the manuscript, folio or quarto; identification of the script; the provenance (pre-copy-text, amanuensis, page proofs, interleaved copy); information, if any, on the verso (Cooper's notes and, often, epigraphs to be employed as chapter headings); extent and nature of revision (light, moderate or heavy in either the author's hand or that of an amanuensis); and any other pertinent observations. If the corrections are major and frequent, if for example, entire pages are deleted or complete paragraphs rewritten, then the revision is considered extensive. Minor corrections, such as an occasional word change, are described as light. Moderate revision, of course, falls somewhere in between these two categories. If a manuscript was used as printer's copy, the accuracy of the printer's brackets designating page divisions of the printed text is examined together with the average number of lines set by each compositor. The number of compositorial signatures is also listed.

Each manuscript segment, identified by its location (private or institutional owner), is listed in its entirety beneath the constants. The information recorded in each listing includes: the total number of manuscript leaves and/or fragments and the collation of each segment with the corresponding page and line numbers of the earliest printed text. Square brackets ([]) are employed to identify any manuscript page number assigned by the compiler. Roman numerals are employed to indicate the volume number of the printed text and Arabic numerals to indicate page and line

numbers. Although the listing of each manuscript segment conforms, in general, to the sequence of the segment in the printed text, exceptions to this rule should be noted. The holdings of particular manuscripts by individual or institutional collections are listed as blocks; and, in consequence, a manuscript segment which corresponds to an earlier part of the printed text may be listed after a segment which corresponds to a later section. For example, the listings for The Prairie indicate that the University of Virginia collection, which corresponds to I, 130.1 - 136.13, is listed after the Yale University collection, which corresponds in parts to volumes I, II and III. This mode of listing facilitates a more concise and readily assimilable record and an easier assessment of those manuscript pages present or missing in a particular text.

Even a cursory examination of Cooper's manuscripts refutes the popular view that his romances were hurriedly scribbled out. Cooper did have enormous creative energies, but his manuscripts reveal that he was far from careless in his habits of composition and much concerned about literary style. William Charvat's remark that "rewriting and revision of manuscripts seem never to have caused him any pain - simply because he did not rewrite,"⁶ was not based on an examination of his manuscripts. Such gratuitous assumptions have helped to create an inadequate image of Cooper the writer and served as impediments to a proper critical assessment of his literary work.

Evidence of significant pre-copy text materials for The Headsman, The

⁶William Charvat, "Cooper as Professional Author," New York History, XXXV (October, 1954), p. 499.

Bravo, and The Monikins indicates that Cooper did far more than "grind out" his novels and articles. In fact, he labored carefully over much of his work, preparing preliminary drafts in at least some instances with entirely different characters and scenes. While some provisional drafts are lightly revised, others differ completely from the final printed form and can only be identified with difficulty. The existence of pre-copy text for these several works suggests that much more such material existed and may still exist. The answer to such questions as these lies, of course, in further searching.

If the manuscript evidence tends to show that Cooper's fiction did not come into existence without labor pains, it indicates also that he could not only be careful but zealous in revision. Corrected amanuensis copies, corrected page proofs and interleaved copies show large numbers of changes in Cooper's hand. The manuscripts of The Prairie (1827), The Red Rover (1827), Notions of the Americans (1828), and The Water-Witch (1831) show major revision. There is, however, less revision in the later manuscripts presumably because economic pressures compelled Cooper to produce at a much more rapid rate. The panic of 1837 and the depression of 1840-43 severely affected an already shaky book market. Cooper's percentage of profit from the American sales of his books declined from 45 percent in the 1820s to 20 percent by the later period.⁷ During these years Cooper was compelled almost to double his earlier productions--averaging about two novels rather than one a year--in order to earn a satisfactory livelihood.

⁷ Ibid., p. 503.

His writings like those of Irving, Hawthorne, Melville and other writers were directly affected by economic realities.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

AMAN	amanuensis copy
MS	manuscript
PRE-COPY-TEXT	provisional draft copy
prp	printed page
[]	Arabic numerals in square brackets refer to page numbers assigned by the compiler
Roman numerals	Volume number