James Fenimore Cooper, Professional Authorship, and the American Literary Marketplace, 1838-1851

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Abstract
This dissertation is a primary-source-intensive literary history that makes use of publishers' records, correspondence, manuscript evidence, and literary works to study how James Fenimore Cooper refashioned his career as a professional author during its last major phase, approximately 1838 to 1851, to adapt to changing conditions he faced in the literary marketplace and to confront challenges—both externally- and self-imposed—to his status and reputation.

Chapter One, "The Tortured Profession of Authorship: Novelist Again," narrates Cooper's return to fiction in 1837-38, considering the professional issues confronting him at the time, such as economic uncertainties, constraints of the typical two-volume format, and alienation from the contemporary literary scene. Cooper's arguments about the nature of fiction, as well as his positions on the proper ethics of authorship, are also treated.

Chapter Two, "Seamanship and Authorship: The History of the Navy to Afloat and Ashore," examines how Cooper's role as an expert on nautical matters contributed to his understanding of his profession as an author, especially in light of his History of the Navy of the United States and the ensuing controversy it stirred in certain quarters. Cooper's other nautical works of the early 1840s are considered, with an in-depth discussion of his first-person double novel Afloat and Ashore as a point of convergence for many of his concerns about authorship.

Chapter Three, "The Commercial Instinct: Leatherstocking Revived," considers Cooper's deliberate efforts to restore his commercial viability by reasserting his artistic powers, reviving his most famous character, Natty Bumppo, in The Pathfinder and again in The Deerslayer. Cooper's failed attempt to create a "standard work" out of the Columbus story, Mercedes of Castile, and his never-realized plans of adding a sixth Leatherstocking tale are also investigated. Chapter Four, "Periodical Publication: Cooper and Graham's Magazine," treats Cooper's experiment in magazine writing, establishing factual foundations on a part of Cooper's career that has heretofore received little attention. His serialized novella Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief receives special consideration for its reflections of Cooper's attitudes on the work and rewards (or lack thereof) of authorship. Finally, Chapter Five, "Publishing Realignments: Cheap Literature and Cooper's Late Career," details Cooper's accommodations to the cheap paperback publishing craze of 1841-43, his separation...
James Fenimore Cooper was born on September 15, 1789 in Burlington, New Jersey, the eleventh of twelve children. When he was one year old, he moved with parents William and Elizabeth to Cooperstown on Ostego Lake in central New York. During Cooper's boyhood, there were few backwoods settlers left and even fewer Indians. He penned The History of the Navy of the United States of America (1839), The Cruise of Sommers (1844), and The Distinguished American Naval Officers (1846). At the time of his death on September 14, 1851, Cooper was more successful and respected abroad than at home. Out of step with his countrymen, his work was very influential to European writers like Honore de Balzac and Leo Tolstoy. James Fenimore Cooper was a popular American author. Born in 1789 in New Jersey, he became part of the Romantic literary movement. Many of his novels were influenced by the years he spent in the U.S. Navy. He was a prolific writer producing something almost every year from 1820 until his death in 1851. He is perhaps most well known for his novel The Last of the Mohicans, which is considered to be an American classic.