

“We’ll take it out like men”: Competitive Masculinity in Novels and Narratives of the Frontier

Gabriella Vöö

Last in the order of publication but the first in the chronological order of the plot, James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Deerslayer* (1841) concludes the Leatherstocking series by giving insight into Natty Bumppo’s earliest exploits as a frontier hero. It is the story of the young hunter “just arriving at manhood” (439), stepping on his first war-path. Cooper solidifies, in retrospect, the character of Natty, and puts him through a series of trials before his passage from boyhood to manhood. In a memorable scene of the novel the young Natty Bumppo confronts an experienced Huron warrior, Le Loup Cervier, over the possession of a canoe. Anticipating his opponent’s perfidy, Natty is tempted to fire the first shot before his opponent has the chance to shoot him in the back. However, he finally decides to keep the rules of fair play: “No-no—that may be red-skin warfare, but it is not a Christian’s gifts. Let the miscreant charge, and then *we’ll take it out like men* [. . .]. No, no; let him take time to load, and God will take care of the right!” (594, italics added). There is no question as to who God is siding with: in the ensuing exchange of fires Natty triumphs over le Loup Cervier who, with his dying words, gives Deerslayer his man’s name, “Hawkeye” (602), emblematic of his change of status from hunter to warrior. Despite the fact that he was brought up by Indians and had spent his life away from, and in contempt of, “civilized” colonial settlements, Natty gives credit to a notion of manhood that is unarguably white, Christian, and ultimately conforming to Euro-American standards of gentility.

Through the character and adventures of Natty Bumppo, Leland Person argues, the author of *The Leatherstocking Tales* addresses “the many cultural conflicts and cross pressures impinging on mid-nineteenth-century men” (78). The various male characters of the *Tales* enact the plight of the American man in a period when his socio-cultural position was in transformation. Set on the American Frontier in the successive phases of the Westward movement, the novels helped establish the popular image of the wilderness as a place for men, and of the American frontier as a scene for manly self-assertion. Often considered as the fictional distillation of the historical figures Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett and Kit Carson, Natty Bumppo provided the model for the hunter-hero in American popular culture. Other male characters in the *Tales*—patriarchal and authoritarian Judge Temple, criminally violent, but enduring Ishmael Bush, slovenly and imprudent Harry March—are also relevant social and gender types recognizable for Cooper’s contemporary readers.

Cooper’s concern was largely with his own white, Anglo-American compatriots meeting the challenge, both economic and cultural, of the westward expansion and racial encounter on the frontier. As a result of the economic, political and social changes during and right after the Jacksonian period the class structure of American society

became increasingly salient (Blumin 66). The class Cooper belonged to, the landed gentry of the northeast, experienced a shift in social status: the gradual diminishment of social relevance under the emerging conditions of entrepreneurial capitalism. Cooper himself lost the larger part of his father's patrimony, and had to regain wealth and status by becoming a professional author. The emergence of the working class and middle class under the conditions of industrial capitalism during the early decades of the nineteenth century¹ brought dramatic changes in the social roles of men and in definitions of what it means to be a man. The present essay will examine how Cooper and two younger authors of popular frontier narratives, Richard Henry Dana, Jr. and Francis Parkman, Jr., explored the masculine experience in Jacksonian America. Defining and measuring manliness was a central concern throughout the five Leatherstocking novels, the uneducated, lower-class Natty often serving as a mouthpiece for the authorial perspective on what it means to be a man. Dana and Parkman, young men with aristocratic, upper-class family backgrounds, modeled their own "manliness" after the model of their middle- and working-class male contemporaries, for whom the new standards of masculinity were competence in the areas of enterprise and of physical labor. For them, life on the frontier provided the representative masculine experience, where the hardships of survival included both the elementary necessities of subsistence and the culturally more complex adventure of racial encounter.

In the urbanized and industrialized northeast, the generation of men coming of age during the 1830s faced social challenges which seriously affected their self-definition. Inherited wealth ceased to imply status as a matter of course. As David Leverenz notes, "[t]he ideology of manhood emerging with entrepreneurial capitalism made competition and power dynamics in the workplace the only source of measuring and valuing oneself" (*Manhood* 85). Dana and Parkman made serious efforts to actively assert their competence in areas of activity that required labor and physical exposure. Both recorded their experiences in popular narratives, giving detailed account of their life on the fringes of the expanding American empire. The two young men belonged to prominent New England families, studied law at Harvard and could have settled for promising careers. They chose instead to make a brief, but nonetheless relevant detour by stepping out, albeit temporarily, from the security of their way of life and seeking self-affirmation under radically new conditions. Dana sailed to California on the merchant ship *Pilgrim* as a common sailor in the years 1834 and 1835. Parkman explored the Oregon and Santa Fé Trails in the company of hunters and trappers in the summer of 1846. On their return, they both published narratives of their adventures in remote areas of the expanding empire, preparing their readers' imaginations for the impending colonization of the territories that later were to become integrated into the United States.² Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840) gives a vivid account of a voyage, around Cape Horn, to Monterey, and the author's adventures on the coastline of Spanish California. Parkman's narrative *The Oregon Trail* (1846) tells about a journey to the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains, the author's time spent with the Ogillallah Sioux, and the buffalo hunts in which he took part.

The two narratives give vivid portrayals of white working-class people living under unaccustomed circumstances, sailors, soldiers, hunters and trappers. An essential concern of these texts is the fashioning of the authors' selves as men, and their struggle to meet newly emerging standards of manhood that were shaped under the social, political and economic circumstances of Jacksonian America. Dana and Parkman were anxiously concerned with their own development as able seaman and frontier hunter. Their books were read by the contemporary reading public as nonfictional accounts providing information about the authors' personal experiences, and a welter of facts about sea and frontier life. The young Boston Brahmins' strife to meet social expectations concerning adult manhood had the appeal of the probable: the narratives provided credible accounts of their authors' development from young gentlemen into adult men.

Class-Based Standards of Masculinity

The problematic nature of manhood is revealed if we stop seeing "man" as a generic term. "As a human invention, manhood," claims Anthony Rotundo, "is learned, used, reinforced, and reshaped by individuals in the course of life" (7). New disciplinary challenges to the grand narratives of history take into account the gendered identity of its agents. Women's history has transformed the view that men as a social group were more involved than women in the making of history. Recent scholarship has been focusing on the social history of men as a gender group with distinctive social roles as well as a socially constructed identity.³ Representations of manhood in mid-nineteenth-century American literature, either fictional, as in the works of Cooper, or nonfictional, as in those of Dana and Parkman, reflect the transformation of these codes during the first decades of the nineteenth century, from communal to self-made manhood (Rotundo 2, 3).

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, redefinitions of masculinity were triggered by the dynamics of industrial capitalism. As Rotundo explains, former social networks that until the late eighteenth century ensured men leading positions in the family and the closer community, and thus, an identity, were supplanted by the shifting rules of entrepreneurial society. The male individual found himself isolated from the former certainties regarding social status (11-13). The rise to presidency of General Andrew Jackson in 1828 and his two-terms rule were marked by the radical redrawing of the social map. Karen Halttunen approximates the emergence of the term "middle class" in the 1830s (29), which reflected the rapid growth in number, and also relevance, of the eighteenth-century "middling-orders" (Blumin 34-38). The low social prestige of manual work, on the other hand, did not change considerably since eighteenth-century (Blumin 121-22). That middle-class prejudice against the lower orders was applied to the frontiersman to a lesser extent was a fact not least due to the cultural impact of frontier romances and popular icons like Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. Cooper's Natty Bumppo comes closer to the eighteenth-century ideal of communal manhood represented by Boone, but is not entirely without the skillful

inventiveness of Crockett. He is lower-class, illiterate, but has unmatched competence in the rugged life in the wilderness, and offers help with self-effacing readiness to those who, according to his standards of morality and notions of chivalry, deserve it. David Leverenz points out that “a new myth of manly heroism [that] begins to emerge in Natty [Bumppo], situated as he is midway between preindustrial hierarchies of the honorable versus the base and a new, more diffusely fluid circulation of entrepreneurial middle-class energies” (“Last” 27). Thus Natty Bumppo, bearing the successive names of Pathfinder, Hawkeye, Deerslayer, is a border-figure, inhabiting, on the one hand, a territory between wilderness and settlement, savagism and civilization. On the other hand, he belongs to a borderland between successive sets of standards regarding manliness, communal and competitive.

Through Natty’s character and development in *The Deerslayer* Cooper explores the complexities of the historical transition affecting the American male individual: the shift from communal to entrepreneurial social model. In the social context of the urbanized, industrialized northeast the scene of manly strife is the marketplace. In the wilderness setting of the novel, Natty advances from the status of the hunter to that of the warrior, seeking self-affirmation in a world of strife and conflict. Cooper investigates how his young hero’s acquisition of a new name initiates him as warrior and adult male individual. “Deerslayer,” provider for the community gives way to “Hawkeye,” a name emphasizing individual skill and achievement in competition with an enemy. At the beginning of the novel Natty, the hunter speaks about his hunting skills with modest deprecation: “There may not be any cowardice in overcoming a deer, but sartin it is, there is no great valour” (499-500). The new standard of manhood symbolized by the warrior’s name “Hawkeye” implies the acknowledgement of antagonism, where triumph over the other male is necessary for proving individual worth.

Although Natty acquires the desired manly identity quite early in the novel, nowhere in the Leatherstocking series is there such an obsessive preoccupation with the standards of manhood, or with the anxieties of men about being “unmanly” as in *The Deerslayer*. Going through trials and confrontations, putting to test his manly abilities, Natty frequently frets over what it means to be a man. His deep-running anxieties may well be a projection of Cooper’s own class anxieties. Leverenz points out as basis of early nineteenth-century ideologies of manhood a deep-running fear of being “humiliated by other men [. . .] in marketplace competition” and detects in these preoccupations with manliness a “compensatory response” (*Manhood* 73). A major challenge for the aristocratic elite to which Cooper, Dana and Parkman belonged was to accommodate to the new conditions of competitive, entrepreneurial capitalism, or to relinquish its social and political relevance entirely. During the 1840s, many patrician families lost status either by going bankrupt, or by simply losing their relevance in the community that was no longer focused on traditional authority figures. The basic class conflict of the period, Leverenz explains, “comes with the rise of the middle class, for whom manhood is based exclusively in work and entrepreneurial competi-

tion" (*Manhood* 74). Cooper's father had been a veritable self-made man under eighteenth-century economic and social circumstances: a frontier patroon, a figure of social authority, founder of Cooperstown. Cooper's class anxiety was caused by his own failure to preserve the legacy of his father, wealth and social status as an aristocratic landowner. However, Dana and Parkman grew up under the changed circumstances of entrepreneurial capitalism. They inherited wealth, but not social relevance, from their fathers. Richard Henry Dana, Senior suffered from depression and exempted himself from public and professional activity (Shapiro 16). Francis Parkman Senior was also depressed, and went through repeated nervous breakdowns (Gale 21). Their sons sought to prove their "manhood" in areas of activity other than intellectual, or even public. The sons' alternative to male powerlessness was travel on the frontier, work and physical exertion, coupled with emotional restraint, and occasional indulgence in violent activities like hunting. However, their narratives, like Cooper's fiction, conceal deep personal and class anxieties beyond the surface of success stories about male initiation and development.

Male Anxieties and Their Compensations

The competing versions of manliness in *The Deerslayer* are rooted in Cooper's multiple allegiances: Whig by family tradition, cherishing Republican values, and an admirer of Democratic President Jackson. Although the novel's primary concern is with Natty's initiation into manhood, other male attitudes represented in the novel are also viable alternatives. Especially the "white" male characters, Harry March and Thomas Hutter, are instrumental in expressing their author's views and worries about the westward expansion and its impact on American society. Moreover, it is they, rather than Natty, who are the plausible male types of the late 1830s. Harry March, or Hurry Skurry, Natty's companion and counterpart in the novel, is a "noble specimen of vigorous manhood," with a "dashing, reckless, offhand manner" and "physical restlessness" (498). He is a threat to what Cooper envisaged as the natural course of American history: the settlement of the frontier and the vanishing of the Indian. Harry's reckless violence suggests that the process of taming the wilderness may run out of control. He reveals another disconcerting trait when he challenges Natty to prove his manhood "with [his] teeth," by devouring the meat of a deer (499). The elemental corporeality of Harry's manly power foreshadows a possible state of frontier liminality that puts the humanity of the agents of history in peril. With Tom Hutter, the former buccaneer retired to his hiding place on Lake Glimmerglass, Cooper introduces another obviously dangerous frontier type, the fortune hunter as criminal element. The lure of the West included the prospect of economic gain as well as a desired individualism and freedom from the constraints of hierarchical society and authority, which was a matter of serious concern for Cooper. His sympathies rest with Natty who, like Tom and Harry, is also lower-class, dialect-speaking, illiterate, yet endowed with the qualities of the "natural aristocrat" (Slotkin 78), suitable for representing the authorial moral perspective. Both Harry and Tom's fixation on killing and scalping Indians, including

women and children, run counter to the norms of genteel morality shared by Cooper and his readers, and articulated, in the novel, by Natty and by the women characters. Throughout the novel, Natty is employed in rescuing and protecting women. The ultimate purpose of his warpath is the rescue of Hist, his Mohican friend Chingachgook is about to marry. During the course of events, he takes charge of Judith and Hetty Hutter, displaying qualities that are maternal, although the memory of his own mother only occurs to him in "childish recollections" (521). However, he does not lose status as a man, for Cooper qualifies his conduct as "manly delicacy that would have done credit to the highest human refinement" (939). In the 1850 "Preface to the Leather-Stocking Tales" Cooper explains in retrospect, his intention to create "a character that possessed little of civilization but its highest principles as they are exhibited in the uneducated, and all of savage life that is not incompatible with these great rules of conduct" (490). Natty represents the Anglo-American male individual at home in the wilderness, but one who also embodies the moral standards of Cooper's audience, an urban, middle class readership. It is important to note, though, that the audience he probably had in mind consisted, in most part, of northeastern upper- and middle-class readers, with a moral perspective determined, largely, by the sentimentalism of women and the Protestant clergy, "the minister and the lady" (Douglas 12). In American society divided along the line of gender into separate spheres women took charge of the domestic sphere and assumed responsibility in matters of family and education (Douglas 74-76). In bringing up young men, the requirements of genteel sentimentality were pitted against the norms of manliness.

For Dana and Parkman, who were a generation younger than Cooper, the masculine ideal is, at least partly, provided by the Leatherstocking novels and the character of Natty Bumppo, but perceived without the gender complexities of the original character. On Cooper's death in 1852 Parkman, in a letter to the Cooper Memorial Committee, acknowledges the writer's lasting influence upon his development as a person and an author. He finds Cooper "a masculine and original genius," acknowledging his "influence in determining the course of [his] life and pursuits" (Williams 248, 250).⁴ For a man seeking to solidify his manly status, the two requisites of northeastern urban "civilization," domesticity and education, have a note of effeminacy. Parkman remembers, in 1868, his younger self as a "pale student, glued to his desk" following "a way of life whose natural fruit is that pallid and emasculate scholarship of which New England has had too many examples." To make up for the debilitating effects of such overly refined, "womanly" engagements upon the developing young male body, he contends that for a young boy there is "no better place than the saddle, and no better companion than the rifle or the oar" ("Autobiographical Letter" 5). According to Dana's recollections, manly activities were practically prescribed to him by his father, with the overt purpose of training him into manhood:

I have since heard [my father] say that he frequently gave me leave to go swimming, boating, skating, & fishing, or into the woods, with other boys,

when it required great effort in his own mind to get over a sense of the dangers I might be in; for he felt that habits of self reliance & self-help, & familiarity with exposure & risks, to a boy not foolhardy, are a greater protection than all the guardings & watchings of the most careful parents, beside being a far better preparation for manhood. (*Autobiographical Sketch* 32)

Parkman, on the other hand, also evaluated his attitude as a young man with lucidity in his autobiographical letter written to Dr. George E. Ellis in 1868 as “a certain ideal of manhood, a little mediæval, but nevertheless good (*Autobiographical Sketch*: 14). In retrospect, Parkman displays an awareness that this desire to meet standards of manliness was the result of a feeling of inadequacy and anxiety of failure:

Feeling that I fell far short of [the ideal of manliness], I proceeded in extreme dissatisfaction to apply heroic remedies. I held the creed that the more hard knocks a man gets, whether in mind or body, the better for him, provided always that he takes them without flinching; and as the means of forcing myself up to the required standard, I put my faith in persistent violence which I thought energy. I held that the true aim of life was not happiness but achievement; had profound respect for physical strength and hardihood when joined with corresponding qualities of character; took pleasure in any moderate hardship, scorned invalidism of all kinds, and was full of the notion, common enough with boys of a certain sort, that the body will always harden and toughen with exercise and exposure. (“Autobiographical Letter” 14)

Both Dana and Parkman seek self-assertion by going to sea and on the frontier in order to escape factors that would lessen their worth as men. In hindsight, Dana sorts out with difficulty his reasons for going shipping out: “When I recall the motives which governed me in this choice, I can hardly tell which predominated, a desire to cure my eyes, my love of adventure & the attraction of the novelty of a life before the mast, or anxiety to escape from the depressing situation of inactivity & dependence at home” (*Autobiographical Sketch* 64-65). Similarly, Parkman’s flight is from “a state of mental tension, habitual for several years, and abundantly mischievous in its effects,” and “a weakness of sight, increasing with ominous rapidity” (*Autobiographical Sketch* 5, 6).

The young gentlemen’s journeys are the quests of white American male individuals asserting themselves according to the newly set rules of entrepreneurial manhood. Nevertheless, neither of the young adventurers is exempt from feelings of inadequacy and failure. In the course of his journey, Parkman records in *The Oregon Trail*, he repeatedly falls victim to disabling illness that from time to time renders him entirely incapable of pursuing his designs (176, 212). Much of his energy is spent on keeping his state hidden from his companions, especially the Indians who would, he intimates, take advantage of his weakness (176). His frequent loss of physical capabilities, his

inability to cope with the challenges of the wilderness threaten with the danger of falling back to the same bodily weakness that he originally intended to overcome by traveling west. Although Parkman's foremost prerequisite for proving his manhood is physical endurance, he is more than once defeated by his own body. Dana's concern about manly self-assertion surfaces, in *Two Years Before the Mast*, in frequent references to working-class men's shared experience in physical labor. He states with much self-assurance that "[n]o man can be a sailor, or know what sailors are, unless he has lived in the forecabin with them" (47), and lived the "hard and exposed life [. . .] in a country where there is neither law nor gospel" (85). Nevertheless, a thinly veiled worry about exposing any bodily insufficiency can be discerned when he makes a hint to the competitive atmosphere in the forecabin: "A well man at sea has little sympathy with one who is sea-sick; he is apt to be too conscious of a comparison which seems favorable to his own manhood" (64). Although Dana does not succumb to ailments except for a toothache (281), his fear of showing unmanly weakness puts him in a defensive position. This defensive manliness, in his case, consists of restraint in forming friendships and attachments, as "no time is allowed on board of ship for sentiment" (4).

Both young patrician authors are keen on pursuing manly goals in a manly manner by distancing themselves from their class, yet without betraying their class allegiances. When they do enter into any kind of camaraderie, they fashion themselves after the romantic heroes of the *Leatherstocking Tales*. They imagine themselves as an Oliver Effingham or a Major Middleton, and project the lower-class Natty Bumppo character upon their companions in the journey. Dana devotes considerable text space to the admirable moral and intellectual qualities of fellow-sailors Tom Harris and Bill Jackson, two Englishmen with whom he develops close, if not intimate, relationships. Parkman's affectionate description of his guide, the Canadian hunter Henry Chatillon could easily be mistaken for a characterization of Natty Bumppo:

The prairies had been his school; he could neither read nor write, but he had a natural refinement and delicacy of mind, such as is rarely found even in women. His manly face was a perfect mirror of uprightness, simplicity, and kindness of heart; he had, moreover, a keen perception of character, and a tact that would preserve him from flagrant error in nay society. (49)

The possibility of male friendships, homosocial bonding reassures the young patrians who step out of the security of their class. They are men seeking male friendships who, instead of cultivating family ties, develop new allegiances with peers. It is, however, intriguing that they both develop attachments to foreigners, English and Canadian, rather than to American compatriots. Such choices may imply deep-running anxieties and nostalgia for a less harsh, less competitive, less ruthless America, a reason that might have been Cooper's as well when he explored the nation's "pre-history" (see Fisher 23-34) in the colonial times.

Male Empowerment and Empire-Building

The five novels of the Leatherstocking series, published between 1823 and 1841, indirectly address problems of the early decades of the nineteenth century: the westward movement, the Missouri Compromise, and Indian Removal. By the conventions of the genre of historical romance, *The Leatherstocking Tales* project tendencies and conflicts of the present into a fictionalized national past. As Richard Slotkin contends, “[i]n the resolution of the historical conflict within the novel frame, the resolution of present tensions is prefigured” (82). Offering a myth of national origins as well as an exemplary hero meets the basic requirements of the national epic. Cooper treats, on the one hand, the problem of ordering geographical space—the frontier—for settlement, and also champions a heroic figure—Natty Bumppo—who inhabits and opens up this mythic space for national history. The publication history of the *Tales* is further intertwined with the most important events of United States empire-building: the first publication of the novels as a series occurred in 1850, at the conclusion of the decade which saw the phrase “manifest destiny” coined, Texas annexed, and the war with Mexico fought.

By accommodating his readers’ imagination to the colonization and settlement of the eastern frontier and the trans-Mississippi area as well as to the dispossession of the Indian, Cooper provided a fictional correlative for an unfolding American imperial history. If *The Leatherstocking Tales* is the epic saga of the nation in the making, it is also a story of the Anglo-American male person in quest of self-affirmation. Within the framework of expansion and colonization, such self-affirmation rests upon the denigration of the European man’s racially alien counterparts. As a white man living among red-skins, Natty Bumppo conceives his own manhood antagonistically: in *The Deerslayer*, he is determined “to do credit to his colour and manhood; one equally removed from recreant alarm and savage boasting” (971). He defines his double allegiance in terms of the distinction between nature and nurture, placing the requisites of whiteness in his body and racial heredity, and regarding his Indianness as acquired: “I’m white in blood, heart, natur’ and gifts, though a little red-skin in Feelin’s and habits” (775). However, although Natty repeatedly stresses his white “gifts,” Cooper does not give full credit to the colonizers’ inherent superiority. The white man without any red-skin “habits” displays inefficiency, if not failure, to meet the challenges of the wilderness. In terms of Frontier competence, Natty’s only match in *The Leatherstocking Tales* is Oliver Edwards of *The Pioneers*, a racially pure Englishman, but also an “adopted” Delaware Indian. The genteel heroes in the series, like Duncan Hayward of *The Last of the Mohicans* and Major Middleton of *The Prairie*, are unable to exert full control over events that threaten white presence and ambitions on the Frontier. *The Deerslayer* finally denounces this presence as one acquired by unjustifiable means of violence. The novel concludes with Captain Warley commanding over an act that Cooper considers an unpardonable failure in humanity, the violent massacre of Hurons. The novel’s other representative white male character, Hurry Harry—whose lower-class brashness conceals moral weakness, and who is never penitent about his

violent acts—remains finally unredeemed. It is only Natty, with his double allegiance to Christian moral values as well as to his acquired Indian qualities, who keeps his integrity unblemished. Cooper built Natty's character to be a mediator between two cultures, Anglo-American and Native American, even though he conceived the solution to the conflict of racial encounter by imagining the elimination, in the not so distant future, of the Indian from the American Frontier.

The travel narratives *Two Years before the Mast* and *The Oregon Trail* convey Dana and Parkman's views about the westward expansion and racial otherness without the mediation of plot and character. An essential subtext of these autobiographical narratives, however, is the authors' development as individuals as well as men. In both works the standards of manhood are outlined within the context of United States expansion and empire building. Dana in *Two Years before the Mast* is intent on proving that he, an upper-class young man is capable of asserting his competence in the field of labor as a seaman. He is also eager to demonstrate that, on the national scale, it is productive competence and efficiency that raise "Anglo-Saxons" above their lesser neighbors. Throughout the narrative of the journey, but especially in the California chapters, Americans are favorably contrasted to Spaniards, Mexicans, and French. Dana gives a deprecating portrayal of the Spanish-speaking inhabitants of Santa Barbara, Monterey and San Diego, dwelling at length on their outdated feudal values. Although the Mexican locals are subliminally perceived as adversaries in an anticipated conflict for the economic and cultural control of California, they appear to be more sinister and pathetic than threateningly antagonistic: "The men appeared to be the laziest of mortals; and indeed, [. . .] there are no people to whom the newly invented Yankee word of 'loafer' is more applicable than to the Spanish Americans" (*Two Years* 43). Anecdotic references, verging between humorous and contemptuous, depict Mexicans as none better than their racially inferior counterparts, wearing cloaks "little better in texture than an Indian's blanket," comical in running after the blown-off roofs of their improperly built shanties, but behaving themselves with the absurd grandeur of medieval chivalry before returning to "their habitual 'occupation' of doing nothing" (43). Although the sea voyage and the publication of the narrative preceded the Mexican War by several years, Dana's account reads like a premature argument for the acquisition of California and New Mexico by the United States.

Parkman's tour and the publication of his book coincided with key events in the process of empire-building. The expedition took place in 1846, the year of the Oregon Treaty, and by the time the *Knickerbocker Magazine* finished publishing the installments of *The Oregon Trail* in 1849, the Mexican War was won. Parkman does not directly address political issues in the narrative. However, he participates in the political rhetoric of the 1840s that deems Mexicans thriftless, lazy and inefficient (see Horsman 209-11). Right in the first chapter, he gives a suggestive description of the United States' nearest national competitors: "On the muddy shore stood some thirty or forty dark slavish-looking Spaniards, gazing stupidly from beneath their broad hats" (39). By denying Spanish-American individuals agility and intelligence, Parkman im-

plicitly passes judgment on the power and capacity of Mexico to compete with the United States. He cites as an evident counterpoint those Anglo-American settlers who, by competence and endurance, are worthy agents of progress and civilization in the territories west of the Mississippi. As a counter-example, Parkman dwells on the masculine traits that distinguish American emigrants to Oregon: “rude indeed in manners, but frank, manly, and intelligent” (99). At the time of the book’s composition Parkman anticipates, and by the time of its publication, justifies the achievement of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Additionally, he conflates definitions of competitive masculinity with the rhetoric of territorial expansion, and Anglo-American political dominance on the continent.

Conclusion

Changing standards of masculinity during the post-Jacksonian period drove young men to first-hand frontier experiences in order to prove their worth as capable men. *Two Years before the Mast* and *The Oregon Trail* reflect how the social role of the American male was renegotiated during the late 1830s and 1840s. Dana and Parkman are fashioning themselves as capable men, and imagine for themselves the parameters for American manhood in antagonism with their own New England urban culture which they associate with weakness and sentiment. The young gentlemen are re-imagining and adopting, for the purposes of their own character development, emerging new standards for the American man. They are, however, dependent on cultural models offered by a novelist belonging to the previous generation: *The Deerslayer* tackles similar problems related to the anxieties of manhood. The two young authors present themselves as heroes similar to Natty Bumppo, however, they do not entirely grasp Cooper’s more complex views about the westward expansion and, most of all, about the racial other.

Both Dana and Parkman belonged to the educated elite, yet chose to turn their backs, temporarily, to the smug urban comfort of their own class. They were inspired to adapt to frontier circumstances and to face the challenge of physical hardships and racial encounter. The patrician young men—Harvard graduates—were seeking to meet the new challenges of the big city by testing their manhood in the wilderness. The experiment implied stepping over class and race boundaries, and experiencing racial contact. They tried, as they went on their respective journeys, to interpret these experiences according to their own views about the historical prospects of the United States. On returning to Boston, they pursued professional and intellectual careers: Dana in maritime law, and Parkman as a historian. Their immersion into working-class culture helped them rise above class distinctions, yet did not permit them to shed preconceptions concerning the character of the racial other. In accordance with the contemporary ideology of manifest destiny, they regarded Protestant Anglo-American frugality and spirit of enterprise as the only possible way to handle the geographical and political challenge of an expanding empire.

NOTES

¹ Stuart Blumin argues that the class structure of American society was formed during the early decades of the 19th century, as a result of the industrial revolution and urbanization (14-16, 66-67).

² The United States acquired the larger part of Oregon following the treaty with Great Britain in June 1846, and California as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February 1848.

³ See *American Manhood* by Anthony Rotundo, *Manhood in the American Renaissance*. However, Leslie Fiedler's ground-breaking book, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion, 1960) inspired research on the social construction of American manhood. See also David G. Pugh, *Sons of Liberty* and Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998).

⁴ Parkman, who later became one of the major romantic historians of his century, effectively "read Cooper's fiction in the historical record" (Slotkin, *Fatal* 81).

WORKS CITED

- Blumin, Stuart. *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Leatherstocking Tales*. Vol. 2: *The Pathfinder: or, The Inland Sea. The Deerslayer: or, The First War-Path*. New York: The Library of America. 1985.
- Cox, James H. "The Power of Sympathy: European American Women Writers Imagine Indigenous Absence." *American Transcendental Quarterly* 15.3: 191-208.
- Dana, Richard Henry, Jr. *An Autobiographical Sketch*. Ed. Robert F. Metzendorf. Hamden, Conn: Shoe String, 1953.
- . *Two Years Before the Mast: A Personal Narrative*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.
- Douglas, Anne. *The Feminization of American Culture*. London: Macmillan, 1996.
- Fisher, Philip. *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Gale, Robert L. *Francis Parkman*. New York: Twayne, 1973.
- Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1982.
- Leverenz, David. "The Last Real Man in America." *Fictions of Masculinity*. Ed. Peter F. Murphy. 21-56.
- . *Manhood and the American Renaissance*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1989.
- Murphy, Peter F., ed. *Fictions of Masculinity*. New York and London: New York UP, 1994.
- Parkman, Francis Jr. "Autobiographical Letter to George B. Ellis." *Francis Parkman: Representative Selections*. Ed. Wilbur L. Schramm. 3-12.

- . *The Oregon Trail*. New York and London: Penguin, 1985.
- Person, Leland S. "The Historical Paradoxes of Manhood in Cooper's *The Deerslayer*." *Novel: A Forum of Fiction*. 32.1 (Fall 1998): 76-98.
- Pugh, David G. *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth Century America*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1983.
- Rotundo, Anthony. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. New York: Basic, 1993.
- Schramm, Wilbur L., ed. *Francis Parkman: Representative Selections*. New York: American Book Company, 1938.
- Shapiro, Samuel. *Richard Henry Dana, Jr. 1815-1882*. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1961.
- Slotkin, Richard. *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization*. New York: Atheneum, 1985.