
The Moral Geography of Cooper's *Miles Wallingford* Novels

by Donald A. Ringe

Because he is so well known for his five Leatherstocking tales, James Fenimore Cooper is most often associated with such New York settings as Otsego Lake, the scene of *The Pioneers* (1823) and *The Deerslayer* (1841), or other parts of the upstate wilderness, the setting for *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and *The Pathfinder* (1840). But these are not the only parts of New York that Cooper uses in his novels. Equally important is the lower Hudson Valley between Albany and New York City, an area he used in both *The Spy* (1821) and in parts of *Satanstoe* (1845), but which plays an especially significant role in his double novel of 1844, *Afloat and Ashore* and *Miles Wallingford*. The ashore part of his book is set for the most part on Clawbonny, a farm in Ulster County. It is the home of five generations of Miles Wallingfords, the first of whom "had purchased it of the Dutch colonist who had originally cleared it from the woods."¹ This is the point from which the latest Miles, the narrator of the novel, embarks on his four sea voyages and to which he returns at last when his many adventures are over.

Though the action of the novel takes place between 1797 and 1804, the narration occurs some forty years later as the sixty-year-old Miles Wallingford recounts the adventures of his youth. This

method of narration gives Cooper a number of advantages. It creates so great a distance between the events and the telling as to allow the narrator, now an aging man, to order and interpret his experience from the point of view of more than a generation later. He sees his youth in a way that would not have been apparent to him while he was living it, at times commenting on his youthful follies; and he can perceive a pattern of meaning in the events of his early life that only the perspective of forty years can give. To achieve these aims, however, Cooper had to keep before the reader a sense of the lapse of time, and Miles repeatedly observes that most things have changed, that the Hudson Valley, New York City, and the world at large were quite different places when he was a young man.

I

Travel on the Hudson in those days, Miles tells us, was by sloop, a type of sailing vessel that sometimes had to wait for the tide to change and occasionally went aground in low water so that days might pass on a trip between Ulster County and Manhattan or on one to Albany. On one occasion, a character even finds it quicker to go ashore on the east bank of the river and travel to New York by land. Unlike the steamboats which, at the time of the narration, hurry passengers along with a great deal of noise and bustle, the sloops, often commanded by a phlegmatic Dutch master, made leisurely trips through the beautiful Hudson Valley. Their pace allowed time for the passengers to enjoy pleasant meals with their friends or to gather on deck "to look at the beauties of the hour," as the characters do at one point in the novel, when, "about a mile above Hudson," they look "toward the south" at what, Miles comments, "is, perhaps, the finest reach of this very beautiful stream" (*MW*, p. 11). Miles knows, of course, that steamboats are more efficient vessels, but he cannot help regretting the loss of the pleasant life that their advent has rendered impossible.

Miles also recalls what New York was like in his youth and the change that has since taken place there. When the novel opens, he describes the city as beginning "a short distance above Duane street" with "a mile and a half of open fields" between the town and "Greenwich, as the little hamlet around the State prison was called" (*AA*, p. 38). He observes that Wall Street in 1799, when he returns from his first voyage, was still the site of private dwellings, and he mentions the main attractions of the city: "a circus kept by a man of

the name of Richetts—the theater in John Street, a very modest Thespian edifice—and a lion, I mean literally the beast, that was kept in a cage quite out of town, that his roaring might not disturb people.” The site, Miles observes, was somewhere in the vicinity of what was to become Franklin Square (AA, p. 117). As the novel closes, moreover, he reveals the rapid growth of the city in the removal of his townhouse up the island to escape the advance of commerce: from Wall Street to Chambers Street in 1805, to Bleecker Street in 1825, and finally to Union Place in 1839 (MW, p. 438).

Cooper maintains a firm sense of the past throughout the novel, keeping before the reader details that recall the period of the action. He even introduces real people who were prominent at the time. In the very first chapter, Miles informs us that when he was a boy, Governor George Clinton, himself “an Ulster County man” and later Vice President of the United States, was an occasional visitor to Clawbonny (AA, p. 3). At other points in the novel, Miles associates with or hears about important New Yorkers, among them the merchants John Murray, Archibald Gracie, and William Bayard,² who are consulted by the Reverend Mr. Hardinge, Miles’s guardian, when he seeks advice on buying a ship for the young man. On his return from his second voyage in 1802, Miles learns that Dr. Benjamin Moore has recently been elected Episcopal Bishop of New York,³ and the passengers Miles rescued in the Pacific, the British Major Merton and his daughter, are taken in hand by the British Consul General, Colonel Thomas Barclay, a native New Yorker who had fled to Nova Scotia after the Revolution but returned in his official capacity in 1799.⁴ Miles even receives dispatches from James Madison, Secretary of State, for delivery in Hamburg, the destination of his final voyage in 1803.

Among the professional men introduced is Miles’s lawyer, Richard Harison, who draws up wills for both Miles and his cousin John and who represents Miles when he returns from his last voyage ostensibly a ruined man. Harison had been a Federalist delegate to the Constitutional Convention at Poughkeepsie in 1788 and served as the first United States Attorney for the Federal District of New York from 1789 to 1801.⁵ Also included are a number of medical men. When his sister Grace becomes seriously ill, Miles sends Neb, his black slave, across the river to summon Dr. Samuel Bard, who lived at Hyde Park; and in a letter to Moses Marble, his first mate, he includes a list of New York physicians, among them David Hosack, Wright Post, Richard Bayley, and William Moore, directing him to

go down the names until he finds a doctor who will come to Clawbonny. Miles even thinks of sending to Philadelphia for Benjamin Rush,⁶ but is “deterred from making the attempt by the distance and the pressing nature of the emergency” (*AA*, p. 489). Bard is not home when Neb delivers the message, but Marble brings the second man on his list, Wright Post, a “tall, slender, middle-aged man, with a bright dark eye” (*AA*, p. 510), who prescribes for the ailing Grace.

In social matters, too, Cooper remains faithful to the historical past. Slavery was still legal in New York at the time of the action, though the process of gradual emancipation had just begun with a law passed in 1799. By 1804, the state, Miles writes, “was on the point of liberating [the] slaves, leaving a few of the younger to serve for a term of years, that should require their owners for the care of their infancies and their educations” (*MW*, p. 420). Though Miles, even as an old man, defends the institution as he knew it in his youth, he is not opposed to emancipation. He offers Neb his freedom while they are both young men, and although Neb refuses to accept it, once he marries Chloe, Lucy Hardinge’s serving girl, Miles gives the couple their freedom papers “at once [relieving] their posterity from the servitude of eight-and-twenty, and five-and-twenty years, according to sex, that might otherwise have hung over all their elder children, until the law, by a general sweep, manumitted everybody.” Neb and his wife remain at Clawbonny, but their children gradually move away “as ambition or curiosity [carry] them into the world” (*MW*, pp. 434–435).

Although Miles is a slaveholder and the owner of a substantial property, he does not stand very high in turn-of-the-century New York society. Those who lived on the west bank of the Hudson did not move in the social circle of those who lived on the east, and the position of the Wallingfords “midway between the gentry and yeomanry of the State” is at best equivocal (*AA*, p. 523). As a result, Miles’s position in New York City is not among the elite, and his occupation, once he becomes the captain of a merchant vessel, further confirms his social inferiority. Though Miles is willing to accept such distinctions, he is very much annoyed that Major Merton and his daughter soon move in the best circles of New York—higher even than they could aspire to at home—merely because they are English. “In that day,” he writes, “the man who had served against the country, provided he was a ‘British officer,’ was a better man than he who had served in our own ranks” (*AA*, p. 346). Miles resents the undue influence that the British exert on New York

society only twenty years after the close of a Revolution that was fought to establish American independence.

In his treatment of the national and international scene, Cooper is equally careful to maintain a sense of the past. During the course of the action, the quasi-war with France occurs (1798–1801), and hostilities between France and England break out in 1803. Miles is affected by both conflicts. While he is returning to America in the course of his first voyage, the ship he is on, the *Tigris*, has a brush with a French privateer from the island of Guadaloupe, and shortly thereafter, she meets the *Ganges*, under the command of Captain Richard Dale. This was the first American warship—actually a converted Indiaman—to go to sea for the protection of American commerce, then suffering much from the depredations of French privateers.⁷ Miles is much impressed with Dale and feels an impulse to join the fledgling navy. Had he done so then, he says, or later in New York when he saw ships fitting for war and young men appearing in uniform, his career would certainly have been different, and he might have become, by the time he is writing, “one of the oldest officers in the service” (AA, p. 95). He decides, however, to remain on merchant vessels.

The quasi-war has, nonetheless, important consequences for him. On his second voyage, as third mate of the *Crisis*, a letter of marque, the ship encounters a French privateer, *La Dame de Nantes*, and captures her after a brief struggle. The Americans also recapture a prize the French ship had taken, and as Miles, who is placed in charge of it, beats his way up the English Channel, he barely escapes assault by a French lugger. The most extended conflict occurs, however, months later in the Pacific, when Moses Marble, now in command of the *Crisis*, anchors at what seems to be a desert island. The ship is captured by a Frenchman, Monsieur Le Compte, who with his men had been shipwrecked there. But when Le Compte sails away with his prize, he leaves behind a schooner, believing that he will be far away before the craft can be readied for sea. The Americans fit out the schooner in short order, pursue Le Compte to the coast of South America, and after a fierce assault, retake the *Crisis* on the very last day, they soon learn, that such a recapture could be considered legal. Peace had been made and the quasi-war with France was over.

The war between England and France causes Miles even more trouble. He learns of it first when, on his third voyage, as captain of the *Dawn*, he is stopped by a British frigate in the Straits of Gibralt-

tar, but at the time—May 1803—he is not molested. Later that year, however, he puts to sea again in the *Dawn*, bound for Hamburg with a cargo of sugar, coffee, and cochineal, and his troubles multiply. As he is leaving New York, he sights the *Leander*, a British man-of-war that had been with Nelson at the Battle of the Nile in 1798. The British ship gives chase, and fearing that he will be boarded and sent to Halifax or Bermuda where his cargo might be confiscated, Miles evades the British cruiser and escapes into the Atlantic. But before he can reach Europe, he is detained by the *Speedy*, a British frigate. When the British captain learns that part of what Miles is carrying was grown on St. Domingo, a French island, he places an English crew on board and orders the *Dawn* into Plymouth, where a British judge will decide on the disposition of both ship and cargo.

Even if they should not be seized, Miles knows that a delay of several months could ruin him. He decides, therefore, to retake his ship and manages to set adrift the British crew. While making his escape, however, he falls in with a French corsair, whose captain claims him as a prize because he has been in the hands of the English. Though Miles again escapes, he is now so short-handed that the *Dawn* is wrecked by a violent gale and both cargo and ship are lost. Picked up by a British frigate that eventually falls in with the *Speedy*, Miles suffers still more injustice. He is arrested and carried to England because it is claimed that he must have murdered the prize crew that had taken control of the *Dawn*. Though innocent of the charge—he saw the men picked up by a British ship bound for the West Indies—Miles has no reason to trust British justice, and he escapes for a third time to make his way home in September 1804. In his own person, Miles has thus suffered the wrongs heaped upon neutral Americans by both belligerents during the Napoleonic wars.

That Miles recalls the past in such detail makes credible his observations on how the world has changed in the intervening forty years. Much of what he valued has been lost, especially the old New York feeling that had derived from a population long settled on the land. Strangers have overrun the state, a “throng from Ireland and Germany . . . now crowd the streets” of the city (AA, p. 347), and advocates of change and progress foster the building of “railroads and canals” (MW, p. 424). Miles knows that things must change. The party, he writes, “which sets up conservatism as its standard” is as dangerous to the state as “that which sets up progress: the one is for preserving things of which it would be better to be rid, while the other crushes all that is necessary and useful in its headlong course.”

Miles is opposed to both. "No sane man can doubt that, in the progress of events, much is produced that ought to be retained, and much generated that it would be wiser to reject" (*MW*, p. 436). How then is one to distinguish between them? Miles does not say directly, but through his experience both afloat and ashore, Cooper makes clear where permanent values lie.

II

Miles acquires his experience in three sharply contrasted areas: the open sea, the farm at Clawbonny, and the city of New York.⁸ Each exists as an actuality presented in realistic terms, but each takes on as well a symbolic meaning, much like that described by W. H. Auden in *The Enchafed Flood*. In the romantic iconography of the sea, Auden explains, there are three primary elements, the sea itself, the city, and the romantic island, each of which may best be understood in relation to the others. The city represents the restrictions of the human community from which the voyager may escape into the freedom, openness, and potentiality of the sea, the place of both possibility and primitive power. The island is the romantic refuge where the voyager may pause in his quest.⁹ In Cooper's version of this spatial metaphor—one that he shares with Hawthorne, Melville, and others—¹⁰city, sea, and island play crucial roles. The farm at Clawbonny is for Miles an island of security in a changing world, the city of New York is a place of social distinctions where he can never be entirely comfortable, and the sea is the questing ground where he can develop qualities of manhood and independence that he could never acquire ashore.

Though Miles's experience at sea is crucial to his life, he does not initiate it himself. It is Rupert Hardinge, his guardian's son and a boyhood friend who first suggests that they run away and who sails with him in the *John*, a merchant vessel bound for China. They make their decision purely in the spirit of adventure, but life afloat quickly reveals a fundamental difference between the two. Miles takes to the sea at once, grows and develops rapidly during the voyage, and arrives at New York at its end an accomplished seaman. Rupert does none of these things. He never returns to sea, therefore, deciding instead to study law in New York. Miles embarks alone on his second voyage, shipping as third mate in the *Crisis* on a journey that eventually takes him around the world and consumes some three years. During this time, Miles matures as a seaman, advancing quickly up

the ladder of promotion as vacancies occur. Before the voyage is over, Miles has become captain of the ship. The sea has been his proving ground, the open space of freedom and opportunity where he develops his potential as a seaman and as a man.

Yet the sea has also a sinister side that presents the voyager with manifold dangers. Terrible storms buffet the vessels in which Miles sails, and one particularly violent tempest, combined with a powerful current, drives the *Crisis* wildly through the Straits of Magellan while the men, unable to determine their position or alter their course, can do little more than ride out the storm. Miles enters a dangerous world when he goes to sea, a world made worse by the depredations of greedy men. Pirates lie in wait among the eastern islands, their proas poised to attack any ship that enters the Straits of Sunda, and Indians on the northwest coast of America wait in ambush for those who come to trade. If the opportunity presents itself, they fall upon the unsuspecting ship, seize the cargo, and murder the crew. Yet even if the voyager escapes the assaults of such native marauders, he may still be attacked by Europeans—the Frenchmen, for example, who, as we have seen, preyed on American vessels during the quasi-war. Nature and man combine to make the sea a very dangerous place for those who venture upon it.

Not all who sail the sea can meet the challenge. Three of the captains under whom Miles serves prove to be inadequate to the task. Captain Robbins, a well-meaning but dull man who has developed a theory of ocean currents, loses the *John* on the coast of Madagascar when, following his theory, he places the ship in so dangerous a position within a reef that it cannot be extricated. Captain Williams, another well-meaning man, develops a false sense of security on the northwest coast of America and fails to take the necessary precautions to protect his ship from the Indians who capture it and kill him. And Moses Marble, first mate of the *Crisis*, who assumes command after Williams is killed, sails to a pearl island where, again through a failure to take precautions, the ship is captured by the Frenchmen who have been shipwrecked there. Though all three men are experienced seamen, none prove worthy of the rank they have attained. Marble, much to his credit, recognizes his limitations and decides to remain a subordinate officer. Because he perceives that Miles has already developed those qualities of mind and character that fit him for command, he agrees to serve under him.

Miles achieves success afloat, but it has its price. He has had to

turn away from the stable values of his life ashore. From the first pages of the novel, the farm at Clawbonny is established as an island of peace and security, ample to satisfy any reasonable needs of its owner. It consists “of three hundred and seventy-two acres of first-rate land, either arable or of rich river bottom in meadows, and of more than a hundred of rocky mountain side, that was very tolerably covered with wood.” The farmhouse, begun in 1707 and added to by subsequent owners, “had an air of substantial comfort without, an appearance that its interior in no manner contradicted.” Though the ceilings might be low and the rooms not large, it was “warm in winter, cool in summer, and tidy, neat, and respectable all the year round.” The “barns, granaries, sties, and other buildings of the farm, were of solid stone, like the dwelling, and all in capital condition,” while all around were “orchards, meadows, and ploughed fields” (AA, pp. 2–3). On such a place Miles could have remained as “a comfortable and free housekeeper, . . . living in abundance, nay, in superfluity, so far as all the ordinary wants were concerned” (AA, p. 20).¹¹

Yet Clawbonny is much more than a place of material comfort. It has other important aspects that make it emotionally satisfying. A tradition of simple living has been carried on for nearly a century, a legacy that includes the local Episcopal church that dates from the days of Queen Anne. Here the Reverend Mr. Hardinge, who succeeded his father as spiritual guide to the little community, maintains an established order that contributes to the peace and security of the farm. Miles does not, however, value these qualities sufficiently. Though he knows that his father, who had also been a sailor, gave up the sea when he took possession of his paternal acres, the young man, who, because of the early death of his parents, has already gained his inheritance, is willing to do the opposite: leave his patrimony to pursue a life at sea. It is only when he and Rupert actually depart and are sailing down the Hudson on their way to New York and adventure, that Miles feels regret for what he is leaving behind: “all that belonged to the farm, began to have a double value in my eyes, and to serve as so many cords attached to my heartstrings” (AA, p. 35).

Miles is soon engrossed in his new occupation, but thoughts of Clawbonny recur at moments of danger. After the *John* is lost, he begins “to think of Clawbonny, and its security, and quiet nights, and well-spread board, and comfortable beds, in a way [he] had never thought of [them] before” (AA, p. 78), and just as the *Tigris* is

about to engage the French privateer, his thoughts return to the farm and the people he left there. But the contrast between life afloat, with its violence and danger, and life ashore, with its peace and security, comes to him most sharply when he finally gets home. "Clawbonny never looked more beautiful than when I first cast eyes on it that afternoon." House and orchards and meadows, fields of corn and ruminating cattle standing beneath the trees—all "seemed to speak of abundance and considerate treatment. Everything denoted peace, plenty, and happiness. Yet this place, with all its blessings and security, had I willfully deserted to encounter pirates in the Straits of Sunda, shipwreck on the shores of Madagascar, jeopardy in an open boat off the Isle of France, and a miraculous preservation from a horrible death on my own coast!" (AA, pp. 105–106).

Despite this recognition, Miles soon goes to sea again on a voyage that will take him away for three years. He doesn't really know why he embarks. The tearful farewells of his sister Grace and Lucy Hardinge elicit the comment: "Man must be a stern being by nature, to be able to tear himself from such friends, in order to encounter enemies, hardships, dangers and toil, and all without any visible motive. Such was my case, however, for I wanted not for a competency, or for most of those advantages which might tempt one to abandon the voyage. Of such a measure, the possibility never crossed my mind" (AA, p. 127). Part of his reason for going is the romantic attraction of the ship's purpose, to sail around the world, but part involves his belief that voyaging is what he is fated to do. This journey is, of course, the one that makes him a man, but when he returns, it is not just Clawbonny which confronts him with an alternative way of life. New York City becomes a third locus of value, and one that is as crucial to his ultimate welfare as his experience at sea or his position as owner of Clawbonny.

It is not so much the social distinctions of New York society that affect Miles. He knows his place precisely and does not envy those above him. What does disturb him, however, is the acceptance by that society of Rupert and Lucy Hardinge, his childhood friends, and the consequences to himself. Both have been taken up and introduced to the New York social world by Mrs. Bradford, a wealthy and socially prominent cousin of their father. Rupert is a weak, self-indulgent, mercenary young man who soon climbs into the society of New York Anglophiles. He loses interest in Miles's sister Grace, whom he had once promised to marry, and abandons her for Emily Merton, the British major's daughter. Yet after

Grace's death, Rupert accepts her bequest of \$20,000, which Miles feels bound in honor to pass on to him. Miles knows Rupert well, has seen his failure to grow and mature at sea, is aware of the shabby way he treated Grace, and knows he has lived on money both he and Grace have given him. Yet Rupert moves freely in social circles to which Miles, though clearly the better man, can never be admitted.

Even more serious is the effect on Miles of Lucy's rise in society. Although he loves her deeply, he has never revealed his affection to her. Both were still too young when he made his first two voyages to be aware of their feelings, and now that he is able to offer her his love, she has moved into a social set to which he cannot aspire. Though Miles as owner of Clawbonny would have been a suitable match for Lucy before Mrs. Bradford took her up, her new position in New York society and his as a ship captain have, in the eyes of the world, moved them so far apart socially that a marriage would not now be even considered. When Mrs. Bradford dies, moreover, and makes Lucy her heir, the girl acquires a wealth much greater than his own, a fact which, in Miles's view, separates her even more from him. Miles learns too that Lucy is being courted by Andrew Drewett, who moves in the same circles as she, and that everyone, including Lucy's father, believes that they are engaged. Small wonder then that Miles becomes embittered at the change which New York has made in his relations with the girl.

What Miles does not recognize in his frustration is that Rupert and Lucy react in totally different ways to their change of fortune. Rupert revels in his new social position and either patronizes or snubs his old friend when he meets them. Lucy does not. Indeed, she gives no indication that her change in status has at all affected her warm, frank, and honest nature. Miles, in his folly, acts in such a way as, inadvertently, to make her believe that he loves Emily Merton, with whom he had spent much time on his ship, and he tells her that he does not intend to marry. Miles is, of course, a very confused young man. He has left the peace and security of Clawbonny to sail the open sea, and while he was away, the girl he has come to love seems to have moved beyond his reach. With the social world of New York closed to him, and Clawbonny having few attractions now that Grace is dead and Lucy apparently lost, Miles decides to go once again to sea. On this final voyage, the greed of both French and British captains and the violence of a tempest all but destroy him.

III

Though the voyage seems at first to have been an unmitigated disaster, it provides the experience Miles must have if he is ever to learn where permanent values may be found. He is already well aware that the social life of the city does not embody them. He has seen, in Andrew Drewett's mother, that a commonplace, unthinking woman may lay claim to social distinction, and, in the career of Rupert Hardinge, that a shallow nature is no bar to social acceptance. He has seen more. On a visit to London during his second voyage, he discovered the iniquity to be found at the lower levels of the social order, where well-known rogues operate openly knowing full well that the law can do little to deter them. Miles even meets a man who escorts him around London with an ulterior motive. Miles has brought a captured ship into port, and the Englishman offers "his services in smuggling anything ashore that the Amanda might happen to contain, and which I," Miles writes, "as the prize-master, might feel a desire to appropriate to my own particular purposes" (AA, p. 160). Miles is repulsed by the social world at its highest and lowest levels.

In his frustration Miles misuses both island and sea. He embarks on his fourth voyage with a purpose quite different from those that motivated the first three. Miles had achieved his maturity by the end of the second voyage, and although he embarked on the third as owner as well as master of the *Dawn*, he merely sailed from port to port as cargoes offered. When he embarks for Hamburg, however, in 1803, he has filled his ship with goods he has bought himself to sell at his own advantage for the high profits he has heard they will command in Europe. Miles does not need the money. He already has the wealth required to satisfy any reasonable want, yet to pay for his cargo, he borrows a large sum from his cousin, John Wallingford, giving him a mortgage on Clawbonny as security. Miles and John agree to make wills naming each other as heir, but John seems so interested in the future of the farm that Miles, after the deed has been done, cannot help feeling suspicious about his cousin's intentions. Though Miles insists that he makes the voyage because he loves the sea and needs an occupation, he has actually risked all he holds dear to pursue unneeded wealth.

The course that the action takes during the voyage can be read in a number of ways. From the historical point of view, Miles exposes himself to the depredations that both England and France made on American shipping during the Napoleonic Wars. Seen in these

terms, his experience illustrates the fate of a weak America when it confronts the unrestrained power of nations that care for nothing but their own interests. And when Miles escapes from the clutches of the British and French cruisers, the destruction of his ship in the violent gale that rakes the Irish Sea can be read as a sign of how helpless even the most skillful men are before the impersonal forces of nature, a theme developed throughout the novel. Although these interpretations are unquestionably valid, both should be understood as subordinate to a third, one that Cooper presents in all his late fiction. What happens to Miles is more than an illustration of historical injustice or the helplessness of men before overwhelming natural forces. Though Miles's experience does reveal both truths, his fate is ultimately the result of a providential power that transcends both history and nature.

Although the providential doctrine is implicit in much that happens throughout the novel, Cooper makes it a point of emphasis in an episode involving Moses Marble, his first mate on the *Dawn*, a short time before the ill-fated voyage. As an infant, Marble had been left "in a basket on a tombstone in a marble-worker's yard" (*MW*, p. 32)—hence his name—and he has lived his life alone, without a single known relative or place to call home. Yet when Marble accompanies Miles on a short trip on the Hudson, he discovers a family that he did not know he had in a series of events that the modern reader might call coincidental, but which Cooper interprets as providential. The boat encounters a flood tide and a falling off of the wind that forces Miles to anchor in a cove to await the turn of the tide. The two men go ashore where Marble discovers his origins. He not only finds a mother but even arrives in time to save her farm from a local usurer. To Miles, the episode has but one meaning: "the mother and child [have] been thrown together by the agency of an inscrutable Providence!" (*MW*, p. 32).

As Miles looks back on his final voyage, he interprets his experience in precisely the same terms. Though he uses ingenuity and skill to escape the British and French cruisers and to save his ship in the violent storm, his own exertions are insufficient to gain his ends. Providence guides the events. This lesson is brought home to him in a most dramatic fashion. By the time he encounters the storm, his crew has been reduced to three men: Diogenes, the black cook; Neb, the slave who has accompanied Miles on all his voyages; and Marble, the first mate. The blacks are washed away when the ship broaches to and a great wave sweeps the deck. It carries Diogenes to his death

and drives Neb, who is in the launch at the time, over the side in a small boat. Much of the rigging comes down under the force of the storm, and as Marble tries to clear it from the ship, he is swept away when the wreck breaks free from the vessel. "In this manner," Miles writes, "did it please divine Providence to separate us four, who had already gone through so much in company!" (*MW*, p. 311).

Alone on his sinking ship and surrounded by a vastness of empty ocean, Miles continues to see his experience in religious terms. His friends gone, his cargo lost, his Clawbonny sacrificed to a bid for wealth he did not need, Miles in his solitude begins to pray "to that dread Being, with whom," he writes, "it now appeared to me, I stood alone, in the centre of the universe" (*MW*, p. 321). Though Miles attempts to save himself by making a raft and stocking it with what he needs to survive, when his ship sinks, he reaches the nadir of his fortunes, and he acquires the deepest sense of his own helplessness. "I cannot describe the sensation that came over me," he recalls, "as I gazed around, and found myself on the broad ocean, floating on a little deck that was only ten feet square, and which was raised less than two feet above the surface of the waters. It was now that I felt the true frailty of my position, and comprehended all its dangers" (*MW*, p. 326). He is safe enough so long as the weather is calm, but even a moderate breeze could raise a sea that would sweep his few possessions away.

Once Miles has been reduced to this perilous state, his fortunes begin to improve. He awakes next morning to find the launch of the *Dawn* not ten yards from him, "thrown within . . . reach," he believes, "by the mercy of divine Providence!" (*MW*, p. 332). What is more, Neb and Marble are both in it. Neb had handled the boat so skillfully that he found the wrecked spars and rescued Marble. The two of them had then searched for the *Dawn* and, failing to find it, had concluded that Providence had swept Miles away (*MW*, p. 331). Providence had, on the contrary, preserved all three, and now that Miles has been shown where his true dependence must lie, he can return to America where additional lessons await him. Thirteen months must pass, however, before he succeeds in reaching home. Picked up by a British frigate bound out to its cruising station, the three remain aboard until they are discovered there by the captain of the frigate they had previously eluded. Taken to his vessel, they are detained for five months before they escape. But even after they find an American vessel to take them home, another five months elapse before they arrive at Philadelphia and make their way to New York.

Here Miles is forced to repeat in a social context the experience he had on the open sea. He is again brought low by forces he cannot control. Because there had been no word from him for so many months, his ship was considered lost and himself presumed dead. At first John Wallingford appeared and assured the people at Clawbonny that no changes would be made, but two months later, the mortgage on Clawbonny was foreclosed and the farm went under a forced sale to a man named Daggett, who acquired it at a fraction of its true value. He dismissed the dependents and laid plans to alter the place completely. Miles soon learns from Daggett's lawyer that John Wallingford has died leaving no will, and the new owner of Clawbonny, who is a cousin of John's on his mother's side, has become the administrator of the estate. A grasping man, Daggett tries to force Miles to surrender his personal effects at less than their true worth as the price for gaining more time to pay off his indebtedness. When Miles refuses to let himself be robbed in this way, he is thrown into jail.

At this low point in his fortunes, Miles learns to still his pride and accept the help of those who come to his aid. Lucy Hardinge and her father hurry at once to the jail, but neither is in a position to stand bail for him. The minister has no money, and Lucy, as a minor, is unable to do so. She makes Miles promise, however, to accept the help of one she will send who can. Miles is surprised when the man who comes to his aid turns out to be Andrew Drewett, to whom he had long believed she was engaged, but he remains true to his word. Drewett then informs him that years before Lucy had refused his offer of marriage, and Miles is relieved of the fear that had troubled him. Freed from jail, he goes to Lucy and the two soon reach an understanding. Miles still perceives her wealth as an obstacle to their marriage, especially now that his own folly has impoverished him, but she makes him put down his pride and accept from her the worldly goods he can no longer command himself. With this agreement, Miles at last achieves the humility that all his recent experience has been designed to teach him.

Once Miles learns this lesson, his material fortunes improve dramatically. Lucy's father arrives with Richard Harison, the well-known lawyer, who informs Miles that his cousin had, as he promised, prepared a will which Harison had not produced only because he did not know of John Wallingford's death. Under its terms, the mortgage is cancelled and the debt forgiven. The forced sale can therefore be set aside and Clawbonny returned to its rightful owner. True to his word, moreover, John Wallingford had

named Miles his heir. As a result, the young man comes into a fortune that is even greater than Lucy's, and, with a touch of remaining pride, he is pleased that he will not be forced to live on her money. Miles goes to Genesee County, where his cousin had lived, to settle his affairs, and while he is gone, Mr. Hardinge takes charge of Clawbonny, brings the dependents back to the farm, and restores everything to its proper condition. Though his ship and cargo are irretrievably lost, Miles is now much better off than he was before he sailed on his final voyage. He marries Lucy Hardinge and settles down to a life of contentment on his beloved Clawbonny.

The happy ending must be read as providential, as the final result of a process by which Miles is brought to perceive his true relation to God, his fellow men, and the things of the material world. All three areas of experience—sea, city, and island—were necessary for his education. Though he returns at last to Clawbonny, the point from which he began, his final settlement on the farm does not imply a retreat from the world nor does it invalidate in any way his experience at sea. For Cooper, life afloat is always a proving ground for character, and Miles had to test himself against the sea in order to become a man and develop those qualities of leadership which he demonstrates so ably when he assumes command of the *Crisis*. But his experience at sea also teaches him the awesome power of God and the insufficiency of men to gain their ends by their own exertions. Miles had to become aware of both his abilities and his limitations before he could assume his appropriate position in a rational social order and make proper use of the worldly goods that go with it.

His life ashore includes, moreover, both Clawbonny and New York. Though Miles had been made to feel the false social distinctions that the city fosters, he does not simply withdraw to his island of security and reject New York completely. He and Lucy retain her house on Manhattan, and when commerce drives them away from Wall Street, Miles builds anew, moving uptown as the city grows. Yet the townhouse is merely the place where Miles and Lucy maintain their contact with the world at large.¹² The focus of their life is Clawbonny, for it represents the domestic values on which, in Cooper's view, the health of society depends. Clawbonny is home and fireside; garden, lawn, orchard and tilled fields; the churchyard and the graves of their families. It is their link with the past, the four generations of Wallingfords that have already lived there; the place of domestic happiness where they raise their family; and the basis

for a peaceful and productive future when yet another Miles Wallingford will inherit the farm and carry on the tradition. It is, in short, the source of those values which insure both stability and continuity in human life.□

Notes

¹ James Fenimore Cooper, *Afloat and Ashore: A Sea Tale*, Mohawk ed. (New York, 1896), p. 2. Citations in my text to *Afloat and Ashore* (AA) and *Miles Wallingford* (MW) are to page numbers in the Mohawk edition.

² John Murray (1737–1808) and William Bayard (1761–1826) may be found in the *DAB*. Archibald Gracie appears in the entry for his grandson, also named Archibald Gracie.

³ Benjamin Moore (1748–1816), who was consecrated bishop on 11 September 1801, may be found in the *DAB*.

⁴ Thomas Barclay (1753–1830) may be found in the *DAB*.

⁵ Information on Richard Harison (Cooper spelled the name Harrison) may be found in Martha J. Lamb, *History of the City of New York: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress* (New York: 1880), II, 350, 367, 475; *History of the State of New York*, ed. Alexander C. Flick (New York, 1934), V, 32, 52, 53, 189; and Sidney J. Pomerantz, *New York, An American City, 1783–1803: A Study of Urban Life* (New York, 1938), pp. 54, 91, 102, 107, 124, 132–133, 136, 207, 335–336, 375–376, 397.

⁶ Samuel Bard (1742–1821), David Hosack (1769–1835), Wright Post (1766–1828), Richard Bayley (1745–1801), and Benjamin Rush (1745–1813) may all be found in the *DAB*. William Moore appears in the entry for his son, Nathaniel Fish Moore.

⁷ For Cooper's historical account of the *Ganges* and Captain Richard Dale, see his *History of the Navy of the United States of America*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, 1847), p. 155.

⁸ Although critics have discussed the novel in terms of the contrast between life afloat and life ashore, none have seen this tripartite division in its geography. See, for example, Thomas Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), pp. 161–164; and George Dekker, *James Fenimore Cooper the Novelist* (London, 1967), pp. 206–212.

⁹ W. H. Auden, *The Enchafed Flood: or, The Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (New York, 1967), pp. 6–25.

¹⁰ For Hawthorne's use of the metaphor, see my article, "Romantic Iconography in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance*," in *Ruined Eden of the Present: Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville*, Critical Essays in Honor of Darrel Abel, ed. G. R. Thompson and Virgil L. Lokke (West Lafayette, Ind., 1981), pp. 93–107. Auden treats Melville in *The Enchafed Flood*.

¹¹ Clawbonny is thus very much like the Van Tassel farm in Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." See *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, ed. Haskell Springer (Boston, 1978), pp. 278–279. I discuss this and related passages in my article, "New York and New England: Irving's Criticism of American Society," *American Literature*, 38 (January 1967), 460–462.

¹² That society is necessary to the human being is illustrated in an episode in which Moses Marble tries to live alone on a desert island and finds he cannot do it. See *Afloat and Ashore*, pp. 318–331, 440–447.