

9-1-2010

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### Recommended Citation

Driver, Darrell W. and McGuire-Driver, Helen E. (2010) "Citizenship in Early American Romance," *New England Journal of Political Science*: Vol. 5: No. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/nejps/vol5/iss1/4>

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**Citizenship in Early American Romance: Case Studies in Charles Brockden Brown,  
Washington Irving, and James Fenimore Cooper**

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Man, according to Alasdair MacIntyre, is a “story telling animal.” “There is no way,” MacIntyre explains, “to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories that constitute its initial dramatic resources” (MacIntyre 1984). Children learn not to cry wolf to avoid the unfortunate fate of a fairy-tale character, parishioners are taught the forgiveness of God through a father’s unqualified acceptance of his prodigal son, and an empire was founded and sustained on a story of two boys suckled by wolves. Such stories have filled all manner of roles in human experience, but perhaps none more important than the place of narratives in the construction of individual and collective identity. In narrative, we find the boundaries between *us* and *them*. In their retelling, we affirm our assignment to what Benedict Anderson termed the “imaginary community” or what Rogers Smith has called “peoplehood” (Anderson 1983; Smith 2003).

Following these insights, and in keeping with similar efforts by Alan Taylor (1995) and Robert Levine (1989), this article considers narratives as reciprocal influences and reflections on contemporary life.<sup>1</sup> A people’s stories, as Alan Taylor points out, are not merely post-hoc impositions of order; they “are woven into life” (1995, 9).

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<sup>1</sup> It is further contended that this influence and reflection of the life-world in literary forms ought not to be limited to the social novel of a Dostoevsky or Dickens but must also be considered in other forms, such as early American romance. This is in keeping with the view by Emerson that, through the construal of living metaphor, the poet was an essential interpreter of reality (Hoffman 1961; Levine 1989).

Accordingly, stories of all variety have held central places in the definition of political membership in America. Indeed, citizenship cannot be understood apart from the narratives that have informed and have been informed by accounts of community membership and acceptance in the American experience. Born in conjunction with the early Republic's effort to define citizenship, the popular romances of the period offer a unique glimpse into the ideas, worldviews, and cultures that lent context and meaning to citizenship debate. The case studies selected are among the most popular and widely read romances in early America, including Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), Washington Irving's *Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon* (1819), and James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826). The conclusions culled from these central pieces of early American literature again call into question, what Karen Orren has labeled, "the big bang theory" of liberal development (Orren 1991, 1), or the once dominant belief that the essence of American social and political development can be traced to an initial liberal inheritance. Equally important for not just liberal but other popular renderings of early American political development, these popular early narratives challenge the view that premodern, feudal conceptions of social and political organization never find their way to American shores.<sup>2</sup> As with Orren's argument that important feudal traditions, concepts, and relationships were smuggled into the American experience in labor law, so too did early literature provide a transmission vehicle for similarly derived premodern conceptions of community and community belonging. Early literature, then, offered a view toward citizenship that adds but another, indeed older, voice to the milieu of America's multiple political traditions.

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<sup>2</sup> The term premodern, as used here, refers to the patterns of community belonging and membership consistent with the social and political organization of medieval European feudalism. Kenneth Lockridge (1985) referred to this pattern as one of insular communitarianism.

### **Views of Citizenship in the Early Republic**

The boundaries of citizenship and the nature of the rules that define inclusion in public life have long been a central preoccupation for western political thought. This has been especially true in the American political tradition, where enduring debates regarding the nature and genealogy of founding ideas have been defined in large part according to the conception of citizenship forwarded by the various schools of thought. These have included liberalism's citizen as the freely choosing self, civic-republican's understanding of citizenship as performatively earned in service to community, and the body of scholarship that has focused on citizenship as linked to identifiable racial or ethnic qualities. All of these accounts have variously looked to the rules of political inclusion to ascertain the influence of different political theoretic traditions on the American experience.

The most dominant of these political theoretic renderings has been that of the liberal consensus school. In this rendering, pioneered most notably by Louis Hartz (1955) and Seymour Martin Lipset (1963), it was the ideas of John Locke that provided the primary intellectual architecture for the founding and subsequent development of American democracy. Locke, declared Hartz, was America's "national cliché," dominating "American political thought as no thinker anywhere dominates the political thought of a nation" (1955, 140). In this Lockean-liberal view of early American political foundations, citizenship and political inclusion is founded in the sacred, natural rights of the individual. Born with such rights, individuals give their consent to participation in a political community by their presence. In fact, the very legitimacy of

such a community is derived from these individual acts of consent, given expressly for the purpose of protecting individual natural rights. The fact that such approaches to political inclusion and constitution were enshrined in colonial documents from as early as the 1641 *Massachusetts Body of Liberties* is evidence of the deep roots such ideas had in the new world even before their chief articulator, Locke, set down his thesis (Lutz 1988; Lutz 1992). According to Samuel Huntington (1981, 23), it has been the continued effort to fully realize these constitutive liberal principles that has defined the American political experience.

Liberal theory has not, however, been without its critics. The liberal state achieves the greatest possible inclusivity by leaving value questions to the individual rather than collective decision. Liberals contend that individuals agree to do this by their presence in the community, and this agreement is the thin consensus upon which the basis of liberal community and collective identity rest (Rawls 1993). Liberal citizenship, then, is founded on few obligations outside of the requirement not to infringe on the rights of others. It is this refusal to articulate a shared collective view of “the good life” or ask more of citizens than merely honoring the rights of others that critics argue impoverish liberal concepts of community and make it difficult to craft meaningful collective identity (Sandel 1981 and 1996). The imperative of inclusivity and collective identity are in a dynamic state of tension in which the value-relativism of strict liberal-state neutrality confounds attempts to form political community out of a collection of individual citizens.<sup>3</sup> With liberal community resting on little more than a thin *modus*

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<sup>3</sup> The search for a way to reconcile this tension has been a primary task of liberal political theory. See, for instance Jürgen Habermas (1981) or John Rawls (Rawls [1971] 1999). Chantal Mouffe (2000) has responded to these attempts by arguing that there is ultimately no way for liberalism to arrive at such a basic organizing consensus without ultimately resorting to some form of exclusivity.

*vevendi* agreement, other American political traditions have sought to fill the void by offering more rigid criteria for community membership and citizen obligation.

In this vein, one of the most comprehensive challenges to the view of a dominant American liberal consensus has come from what Joyce Appleby termed the “protean concept” of republicanism (1985, 461). Emerging largely from the writings of Bernard Bailyn (1967) and J. G. A. Pocock (1975), this tradition emphasized early American belief in public virtue, civic-participation, and the community obligations of the independent virtuous citizen as essential building blocks of a free republic. Drawing on this tradition, R. Claire Snyder has argued that early American conceptions of citizenship, following those of its civic-republican inheritance, were performatively based. Citizenship was not something with which one was born or even irrevocably bequeathed. Political inclusion was to be continually earned through participation in civic and martial practices (Snyder 1999, 3). Similarly, Linda Kerber has outlined the way in which this focus on the obligation side of citizenship has been employed to more narrowly define the boundaries of political inclusion and citizenship rights, often to the exclusion of women (Kerber 1998, 10).

Still other biographers of citizenship in early America have pointed to the flaws in both the liberal and republican conceptions of political inclusion, especially how both fail to account for the overt ways by which ascriptive characteristics, like race and ethnicity, were employed to define community boundaries. Rogers Smith critiques the early observations of Alexis de Tocqueville and the latter-day arguments of Louis Hartz especially, as stressing too forcefully the liberal democratic features of early American communities, while largely ignoring the glaring inegalitarian boundaries drawn around

full liberal democratic participation (Smith 1997, 13-39). Such arguments, of course, are not new, reflecting an enduring realization that political inclusion has, for most of American history, been defined according to preferred racial and ethnic qualities (Stevens 1995).

Though this has been but the briefest of surveys of an expansive literature on citizenship and community inclusion in the early Republic, two important points quickly become apparent from these debates. First, there is clear evidence that each of these traditions has had their role in defining inclusion in early American community. Rogers Smith refers to this realization as America's multiple traditions, whereby "political actors have always promoted civic ideologies that blend liberal, democratic republican, and inegalitarian ascriptive elements in various combinations designed to be politically popular" (Smith 1997, 6). Second, each of these traditions are variously presented as an attempt to define community boundaries in ways that are markedly different from those boundaries imposed under the feudal structures of the old Europe. In this way, Louis Hartz's conclusion that America had skipped "the feudal stage of history" appears generally accepted (1955, 3). The task, then, in early American political development was in determining, absent the feudal test of birthright and original community membership, how community inclusion and exclusion would be determined. With communities no longer being settled and relatively static, it was not possible to define political communities as entirely natural. Consequently, both liberalism and republicanism become useful in America for their ability to define political inclusion in more dynamic settings, even as ascriptive qualifications allow static ethnic and racial boundaries to endure. The quest, then, to understand how these definitions and

redefinitions occurred forms the background for the following effort—the task: to uncover clues to inclusion and exclusion, what constitutes the insider and the outsider by looking not to formal legal expressions of these boundaries but to the way in which community boundaries are expressed informally in some of the most popular literature of the early Republic.

### **The View of Community: Inclusion in Early American Romance**

Contrary to conventional wisdom, early American public discourse was not entirely without a feudal inheritance. At least in the popular literature of the time, communities were still viewed as natural. Instead of John Locke, it is the British jurist Lord Edward Coke’s natural understanding of political community that resonates strongly in early American romantic themes. Rather than the consent of the freely choosing liberal self, the performatively linked sacrifice of the republican citizen, or even the possession of desirable ascriptive qualities, it is the test of birthright or original membership that emerges in these narratives as the central criterion of community acceptance and membership. Individuals in this view are natural and unchanging extensions of their original communities and all attempts to circumvent this essential reality must necessarily fail. Those outsiders who through their deeds attempt to purchase membership in the community inevitably prove unworthy of the community’s trust. Rooted in a static view of the self, these narratives confirm more fixed and circumscribed interpretations of citizenship and community membership than those that the dominant American traditions suggest. Indeed, despite the contention of Brockden Brown, that he had set about to offer a “new performance” and open “new views”



(Brown 1984, 3), in at least one important respect the early American romantic themes in which Brown traded were far from new. The America of these important narratives was not fully unencumbered by the ideas of status, place, and natural communities that defined the *Ancien Régime*.

### **Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland***

Though Charles Brockden Brown's 1798 *Wieland* draws upon many elements from the English romantic tradition, *Wieland's* oft used subtitle, *Transformations: An American Tale*, is revealing of a story that sets out to address a set of distinctly American concerns. The ultimate fate of Brown's small community outside Philadelphia, containing Clara (the narrator), Wieland (her brother), Catherine (Wieland's wife), Pleyel (Catherine's brother), and Louisa (the orphan), presents the reader with a study in group destruction and social ruination. In the story of this small American group, Brown offers lessons for all eighteenth-century Americans. Newcomers may seem genuine and resemble longtime members of the community initially, but this is only a façade that will inevitably turn to deceit and societal ruin.

In the novel, Brown's newcomer, Francis Carwin, is introduced by Clara in a way that reveals his ultimate role: "It is with a shuddering reluctance that I enter on the province of describing him...My blood is congealed: and my fingers are palsied when I call up his image" (Brown 1993b, 49). One understands immediately that Carwin is a dangerous imposition on existing bucolic conditions, for when Carwin enters Clara's community, "something whispered that the happiness...at present...was set on mutable foundations" (Brown 1993b, 54). The narrator, thus, reveals what the learned observer

must already suspect: acceptance and the extension of community membership must be jealously guarded, lest the present social accord end in destruction.

As the narrative progresses, the characters learn little about Carwin. He “studiously avoided all mention of his past or present situation. Even the place of his abode in the city he concealed from us” (Brown 1993b, 72). After a month in Carwin’s company, the members still are “in no degree enlightened respecting his genuine character and views” (Brown 1993b, 76). When the characters do learn of Carwin’s background, a personal history of assorted cultures, languages, and religions only heighten the reader’s suspicions (Brown 1993b, 68). Clara points out that although Carwin is English, he is “well acquainted with the neighboring countries,” which causes “his garb, aspect, and deportment” to be “wholly Spanish” (Brown 1993b, 67). Carwin’s interest in Spain causes him to apparently “[embrace] the Catholic religion, and [adopt] a Spanish name instead of his own” (Brown 1993b, 67). Brown’s newcomer is, thus, attributed with chameleon-like qualities of transformation which exposes the reader to simultaneous images of what, by the late eighteenth century, had become the stereotypical immigrant convict similar to Defoe’s character, Moll Flanders (2002). Also, like Brown’s later character Edgar Huntly who distrusts the Irish immigrant Clithero because of the “ignorance in which we were placed respecting his former situation [and] his possible motives for abandoning his country” (Brown 1984, 14), Carwin’s varied background serves to add to the character’s mystery, effectively foreshadowing his ultimate role in the community’s undoing. From the beginning, Brown depicts Carwin as dangerous and untrustworthy, not because of any particular deed or act he has committed, but because he is an outsider with indeterminate origins.

Although it immediately becomes evident that Carwin cannot be trusted, his transformative abilities allow him to gain quick and easy access to the small community in the novel. Brown describes Carwin as an unsettled man capable of changing his “ungainly and disproportioned” form to an appearance “uniform” with the rest of the society (Brown 1993b, 76). Carwin’s ability to easily fit into a society is in large part due to his outward appearance, especially Carwin’s voice, which “was not only mellifluous and clear, but the emphasis was so just, and the modulation so impassioned, that it seemed as if an heart of stone could not fail of being moved by it” (Brown 1993b, 52). This voice allows Carwin to have an emotional influence on others. When Clara hears Carwin’s voice for the first time, her “heart overflowed with sympathy, and [her] eyes with unbidden tears” (Brown 1993b, 52). Soon, this gift of elocution purchases Carwin entrance to the small family: “No man possessed a larger store of knowledge, or a greater degree of skill in the communication of it to others: Hence he was regarded as an inestimable addition to our society” (Brown 1993b, 76). The group accepts him into their community, partly due to, as Clara admits, a feeling of “familiarity” which comes through being “constant associates” with this mysterious outsider, who “each day introduced” the group “to a more intimate acquaintance with his sentiments,” but left the group “wholly in the dark, concerning” his background (Brown 1993b, 72). This familiarity eventually leads to a central place in the family; Carwin “entered and departed [their home] without ceremony” (Brown 1993b, 76).

Although Carwin outwardly seems to be molded into an acceptable member of the Wieland community, on the inside he has devious tendencies that serve to undermine its existence. Carwin’s gift of “Biloquium or vetrilocation” (Brown 1993b, 198) allows him

to exactly mimic each character's voice. Carwin uses his talent for selfish reasons in the novel: to snoop (as when he was perusing Clara's closet), to meddle (when he spoke as though he knew Playel's lover was dead), to test (as when he wanted to see how courageous Clara really was), or to trick ("to deceive [Playel] would be the sweetest triumph [he] had ever enjoyed") (Brown 1993b, 210). Self-absorbed in his games, he either is oblivious or dispassionate to the havoc he creates. Such lack of concern reflects the corruptive influence one should expect from the outsider. Rather than a true participant, Carwin can never be more than a voyeur to the feelings of community and common concern that had formerly sustained this tiny clan.

It is only after Carwin causes havoc to this community through his whispers of innuendos that the members learn of his true background: "under sentence of death [Carwin...] had escaped from Newgate prison in Dublin" (129). However, by that point, it is too late. Carwin's ventriloquy is heard by most every member of the Wieland family, and this ventriloquy finally succeeds in upsetting the delicate balance in Wieland's mental state. As all of the characters, including the narrator, begin to obey the commands of Carwin's voice, Wieland finds the sinister inducements of his own internal voice, in addition to Carwin's ventriloquy, increasingly acceptable. By the time the other characters realize Carwin's corruption of Wieland, it is too late to prevent ruin. A rampaging Wieland kills Louisa, Catherine, the innocent children, and, eventually, himself. To escape the horrific memories, Playel and Clara are forced to leave their home, while Carwin simply melts away in search of other communities to inhabit. Contemplating the destruction of her little community, Clara explains that, with Carwin, "it was merely requisite to hide himself . . . and [he] may come to think, without

insupportable remorse, on the evils to which his fatal talents have given birth” (Brown 1993b, 239). Carwin’s meddling and trickery soon prove the truth in outsider caution. The group’s acceptance of this enigmatic outsider without any consideration of his past ultimately sets off a chain of events that crushes this small community.

Through Carwin, Brown illustrates the drastic consequences of a community that accepts an outsider without vested interest in or bonds within a community. Community membership must be closely guarded against those who merely *appear* worthy of acceptance. Demonstrable traits and performative efforts to gain access should be viewed suspiciously. Community protection requires the kind of discernment that can only come through strict exclusion of those who would seek to purchase, through deeds or appearance, membership in the polis. One cannot know for sure why these people left their previous societies, and no one can fully know their backgrounds or foresee their future intentions. Failure to adhere to this standard threatens to unleash disruption, discord, and infection in what would otherwise be a stable, well-balanced community. It is an insularity of disposition inconsistent with more dynamic views of political membership forwarded in liberal accounts of early American development. Brown’s comment in *Memoirs of Carwin* is most revealing: “We are frequently in most danger when we deem ourselves most safe, and our fortress is taken sometimes through a point, whose weakness nothing, it should seem, but the blindest stupidity, could overlook” (Brown 1993a, 301). It is a sentiment that would not have been lost on the eighteenth century American and one which would prove persistent in a maturing American fiction.

**Washington Irving’s *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.***

Washington Irving's 1819 book *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* contains a number of tales that speak directly to the concern over community acceptance and trust for the newcomer. In both latent and overt ways, this issue achieves almost ubiquitous status in Irving's tales. The story of "Philip of Pokanoket" is a more obvious example. Here Irving describes how the native Wampanoag tribe extends "the rites of primitive hospitality" by becoming "firm and magnanimous friend[s]" to the arriving white settlers. Soon, however, the white settlers grow "harsh and inconsiderate in their treatment of the natives" and eventually kill the tribe's chief, burn their village, and disband the tribe (Irving 1983d, 1015-16). In larger terms, this is the story of the American aboriginal people, one of countless communities challenged and eclipsed by the encroaching white strangers. These stories become sadly paradoxical lessons for burgeoning settlements across the American frontier.

Irving returns to the familiar theme of the *other* as an unknown stranger in his "Pride of the Village." Echoing many of the themes found in Hannah Foster's *Coquette* (1986),<sup>4</sup> "The Pride of the Village" depicts a young and beautiful English farm girl who "appeared like some tender plant of the garden, blooming accidentally amid the hardier natives of the field" only to fall victim to the seduction of an esteemed young man, "a young officer whose regiment had been recently quartered in the neighbourhood" (Irving 1983e, 1042). The officer endeavors to seduce this inexperienced girl by teaching her "to see new beauties in nature," talking to her "in the language of polite and cultivated life," and breathing to her "the witcheries of romance and poetry" (Irving 1983e, 1043). He

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<sup>4</sup> In true Biblical fashion, these tales contain weak and gullible women in the community who provide entrance to the infectious stranger. The young girl in "Pride of the Village" pays for this gullibility with her own personal tragedy, while Katrina Van Tassel from "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" threatens to introduce a stranger consumed with self-interest and a community-destructive avarice. For a discussion of the American tendency to depict women as the Eve-like introducers of sin see Morone (2003).

attempts to lead the young girl away from her village, by venturing “to propose that she should leave her home, and be the companion of his fortunes” (Irving 1983e, 1042). The reader quickly realizes that the officer’s objective is to rob the girl of her virtue, but, because the officer is “quite a novice in seduction,” the young innocent eventually realizes his true intentions and rejects his attempts at seduction by shrinking “back aghast as from a viper” (Irving 1983e, 1045). She gives the officer “a look of anguish...and...fled, as if for refuge, to her father’s cottage” (Irving 1983e, 1045). Although the incident so scars the young girl that she eventually dies of a broken heart, the officer’s humiliation quickly passes, replaced with “new scenes, new pleasures, and new companions” which “soon dissipated his self reproach, and stifled his tenderness” (Irving 1983e, 1045).

The story quickly reveals that neither high social and political status nor the commitment and service typically associated with the English officer are suitable replacements for longstanding community membership. Indeed, far from being a qualification for trust and acceptance, the performance of the officer’s soldierly duties took him from community to community and prevented the kind of longstanding residence required of fully functioning trusted community members. This lack of roots prevents the officer from establishing the kind of original belonging that full acceptance requires. The result is a self-interested person who—although seductive and interesting—is ultimately destined to betray the common good of the community.

This distrust of new petitions for community inclusion continues through Irving’s more familiar stories. In “Rip Van Winkle,” Irving attempts to demonstrate the sudden and profound change the Revolutionary War wrought on America. Equally important,

however, the story of Rip Van Winkle offers a revealing glimpse into the question of boundaries and community membership. Rip, a hen-pecked, agreeable, lazy husband, comes across a stranger, “a short, square built old fellow, with thick bushy hair and a grizzled beard,” on a ramble one day (Irving 1983c, 774). The stranger beckons Rip to follow him and partake of drink, causing Rip’s inebriation and eventual twenty-year slumber. The understandable conclusion is that one should be wary of unfamiliar persons seeking company. However, this *prima facie* moral becomes more interesting when Rip finally returns to his village and walks straight into the fervor of an election. The members of the community passionately confront Rip: “on which side he voted?” “Federal or Democate?” “What brought him to the election with a gun on his shoulder and a mob at his heels[?]” “Whether he meant to breed a riot in the villiage?” When Rip finally spoke, claiming to be a “loyal subject of the King,” the mob becomes further incensed: “A tory! A tory! A spy! A Refugee! Hustle him! Away with him!” (Irving 1983c, 780). It is only after Rip convinces the village that he is a born and bred member of the community that its members desist with their hostility.

Thus, distrust and animosity is replaced with acceptance only when Rip is recalled as the slothful and indolent community member of twenty-years past. When it comes to Rip’s acceptance, the familiarity and knowing brought by his ultimate identification trumps his political missteps, outward appearance, and—what was confirmed to be—a penchant for drink and leisure. This sense of Rip’s community membership as being a natural consequence of original birthright belies Lockean consensual or republican performatively linked interpretations. Despite the rapidity of change, Rip’s community was natural and enduring.



Irving explores these themes further in his “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” The outsider in this story is the lanky, greedy pedagogue from Connecticut: Ichabod Crane. Crane shares similarities with the previously mentioned outsiders, with the notable exception of his ridiculous appearance: “He [is] tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together” (Irving 1983b, 1062). Because of his awkward appearance, he does not have the seductive powers of Brown’s Carwin or Irving’s officer in “Pride of the Villiage.” Yet, like the aforementioned characters, his self-interest and greed caused him to show little concern for the welfare of others. For Ichabod, his appetite and lust for food serves to fuel this greed; he is “a huge feeder, and...had the dilating powers of an Anaconda” (Irving 1983b, 1062). Because Crane’s career of choice gave him little means of appeasing his enormous appetite, Crane relies on whatever goodwill his school teacher status and “useful and agreeable” personality brings to his table (Irving 1983b, 1062). For these reasons, Ichabod searches for boarding and lodging “at the houses of the farmers...With these he lives successively a week at a time, thus going the rounds of the neighbourhood, with all his worldly effects tied up in a cotton handkerchief” (Irving 1983b, 1062).

Crane’s transience is not unlike that of Carwin or the young officer’s; it exposes in the character a socially destructive rootlessness that breeds selfish interest and lack of concern for others. For example, the reader is initially led to believe that Ichabod is in love with the beautiful Katrina Van Tassel. Soon, however, it becomes apparent that Ichabod has less honorable notions in mind. Crane thinks of Katrina as a tasty “morsel” that he can devour, along with the rest of her dowery (Irving 1983b, 1066). As he

considers Katrina, he rolls “his great green eyes over the fat meadow lands, the rich fields of wheat, of rye, of buckwheat, and Indian corn, and the orchards burthened with ruddy fruit...his heart yearn[s] after the damsel who [is] to inherit these domains, and his imagination expand[s] with the idea” (Irving 1983b, 1067). Ichabod’s more troubling desires eclipses his cupidity. Ichabod intends to sell all of these tethering possessions in exchange for more portable wealth; he dreams of “the blooming Katrina, with a whole family of children, mounted on the top of a wagon loaded with household trumpery, with pots and kettles dangling beneath; and he [beholds] himself bestriding a pacing mare, with a colt at her heels, setting out for Kentucky, Tennessee, or the Lord knows where!” (Irving 1983b, 1067). In short, Irving’s Ichabod Crane offers another rendering of a common character in early American fiction. He is the outsider; the one who would—despite his affability and honorable profession—betray the known world of the Sleepy Hollow community. This monotonous society had managed—as its name implies—to resist the decline brought by change, to balance itself against the forces of time and history, only to see this challenged by the corruptive intentions of the newly arrived Ichabod. It is the newcomer who stood ready to exploit the community and its members to fund his penchant for adventure.

Crane’s appearance, like the rest of Irving’s newcomers, proves to be deceiving. Although appearing to be amiable and respectable, the *other* in these tales is a powerful and treacherous force that must be studied and assessed with care. Communities should be ever vigilant in their acceptance of these *others*. Like the unlucky urchin in Irving’s “The Angler,” who at an early age was “induced to run away from his family, and betake himself to a seafaring life,” these types are best kept at arm’s distance. Though the

urchin finds a village in which he is a “universal favourite,” he is destined for an existence outside the public life of the community, one living alone “on the skirts of the village” with a family consisting of a large one-eyed black cat “and a parrot which he had caught and tamed” (Irving 1983a, 1056). Indeed, in the literary milieu of the Early Republic, trust and acceptance are precious commodities that must be guarded jealously for the sake of civic health. Missing is the social atomism and dynamic triumphant individualism which Hartz, in reference to the Horatio Alger, labeled “the peculiar instinct of a Lockian world” (Hartz 1955, 23). In their place is a thicker, more insular conception of the bond between community and its individual members.

### **James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans***

James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales further embrace this sense of natural community and original membership through an abiding depiction of the self as the static heir of these initial circumstances. Perhaps no character is more typical of this unchanging, unevolving steadiness than Cooper’s Natty Bumppo. The main character and critical continuity of the Leatherstocking Tales, Natty Bumppo is the consummate frontiersman hero. The rugged, untamed nature of the American wilderness appears to live in him as much as he lives in it. Bumppo’s nature becomes the static continuity and in many ways the predictable moral center for a series of stories that typify the uncertainty and insecurity in the early American experience. Bumppo’s concerns are those of an inchoate American Republic—the destruction of the American wilderness, the greed of the American consumer, and the central question of American identity.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> These themes are best seen in the “pigeon scene” from *The Pioneers*. A group of villagers set out in the early morning to hunt the many pigeons that congregate in the central New York wilderness in spring. The

The latter theme is revealing in its implications for citizenship and community membership in Cooper's enduring 1826 novel *The Last of the Mohicans*. In this second story of Cooper's narrative sequence, Natty Bumppo, also called Hawkeye, finds himself in a world unlike those previously discussed. There is no well-balanced natural community facing the dangerous contagion of the outsider. Rather than residing in their original communities, the characters' original communities reside in them. Cooper's depiction of this abiding reality colors a narrative in which static identity and lack of character evolution offer dependable guides in an otherwise chaotic and uncertain world. This eclectic array of preset individuals is forced together in a story that highlights the naturalness of community membership and the dangers of violating this important reality. Each of these characters comes to the story with endowed and unchangeable characteristics that define his/her identity and inform his/her role in the ensuing adventures. With the exception of the longtime wilderness dwellers Hawkeye, Chingachgook (Hawkeye's Mohican adopted brother), and Uncas (Chingachgook's son and last young male of the Mohican Tribe), the striking feature of Cooper's characters is the degree to which they appear completely out of place in their new wilderness setting. These misplaced individuals are all utterly dependent on Chingachgook, Uncas, and Hawkeye for survival.

For example, on the surface, Major Heyward would seem to be the best suited for this wilderness environment. As a military man, he has a strong personality, youthful

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pigeons are so plentiful that a person would have to "look an hour [... to] find a hole through which to get a peep at the sun" (Cooper 2009, 622). The settlers respond to this bounty by shooting at the birds with a vengeance, using shot guns, ducking guns, horse man's pistols, bows and arrows, and even a miniature cannon. After the hunters are through, the ground becomes littered with wounded birds and one of these men realizes that "he has purchased pleasure at the price of misery to others" (Cooper 2009, 626). In this singular scene, Cooper wrestles with his concern for American identity and its central place and lasting impact on the American wilderness.

exuberance, and strict adherence to societal obligations; he is often described as youthful and full of pride (Cooper 1984, 25). He is a gentleman to the two young women in the group and takes care of them diligently, even to the point of risking his life in order to save theirs (Cooper 1984, 92). However, these chivalrous characteristics ultimately fail him in his new unregulated wilderness environment. In this setting, he appears naive when he agrees to follow the highly suspicious Indian runner, Magua. Eventually, Heyward becomes so desperately lost and confused that he begs Hawkeye for help; “desert me not, for God’s sake! Remain to defend those I escort” (48). Hayward, the strong and determined officer, cannot negotiate the wild world of the central New York wilderness without the help of the native Mohicans.

The other prominent English officer, Lieutenant Colonial Munro, appears even more ineffective in this uncertain new world. His introduction to the story comes while being babied by his daughter, Alice: “Alice sat upon his knee, parting the gray hairs on the forehead of the old man” (181). His poor judgment is highlighted by his decision to send his daughters, the beautiful and naive Alice and Cora, through the forest with a Native American scout whom he had just severely punished. This decision might have been tenable in the rigid discipline of his English military world, but in this setting it appears absurd. Faced with losing his two daughters, he, like Heyward, becomes completely dependent on the Mohicans for help. Munro’s child-like ineffectiveness does not change with the lessons of his folly. At the end of the story, he remains the same weak, inept leader he appears to be at the beginning. His ineptness is merely highlighted by this new, unfamiliar world.

Another of Cooper's odd assortment of misplaced characters is a courageous and likable version of Ichabod Crane: David Gamut. Though his proclivity to break into song at a moment's notice would have fit well in the company of his former European colleagues, in this new world, he appears inappropriate and silly; the "ill-assorted and injudicious attire of the individual only served to render his awkwardness more conspicuous" (Cooper 1984, 13). Hawkeye appears to be particularly frustrated with David's odd demeanor and ridicules the songster throughout the story. When Heyward expresses his relief that Alice and Cora are with David, Hawkeye jokes that, for the captives, "he will do their singing. Can he slay a buck for their dinner; journey by the moss on the beeches, or cut the throat of a Huron?" (Cooper 1984, 217). Clearly the answer is no; David comes to his new surroundings with the legacy of a former world firmly fixed in his essence, and this immutable fact leaves him wholly ill-equipped for survival in the wilderness. Despite the incongruity of his ways, David embraces his "own high vocation, which is instruction in sacred music" to the end of the narrative (Cooper 1984, 64). For Cooper, he could not have done otherwise.

David's adeptness in the area of high culture does, however, make him instant friends with Alice, who shares his background in the genteel world. Alice is refined to the point of being wholly unsuited for the wilderness. She is often described as "tender," like a flower "which, though so sweet, [was] never made for the wilderness" (Cooper 1984, 48). Despite being kidnapped and witnessing her sister's death, the end of the story finds Alice's tender innocent manner unchanged. Cora's story is a bit more complicated. She too exhibits a delicate demeanor that makes her ill-placed in the harsh wilderness environment. Nevertheless, she does often find a courageous voice that allows her to

routinely challenge her captors. Cooper offers Cora's darker skin and African descent as a potential explanation of the difference in spirit between the two women's conduct.

The narrative's antagonist, Magua or *Le Renard Subtil* (the subtle fox) perhaps offers the best view of Cooper's penchant to use community antecedents as a means of foreshadowing individual character and conduct. When Cooper introduces Magua, the reader immediately appreciates his treacherous nature. Described as a suspicious 'savage,' 'repulsive,' and animal-like, Magua has "a sullen fierceness mingled with the quiet of the savage" (Cooper 1984, 15). His eyes are "in a state of native wildness" (Cooper 1984, 15). Conversely, Chingachgook and Uncas, the other major Native American characters, are grave, chivalrous, stern, dignified, and solemn (Cooper 1984, 27-29). Magua's tendencies are fixed by his birth. He is a Mingo, a Huron, and as Leatherstocking explains, "he who is born a Mingo will die a Mingo" (Cooper 1984, 39). Ever the experienced and discerning hero, Hawkeye, recognizes this in Magua instantly; "you can never make anything of them [Mingos] but skulks and vagabonds" (Cooper 1984, 35). Magua enters the narrative as a vagabond and leaves as a vagabond.

The details of Magua's story, however, are more revealing. Though born and raised a Huron (the longstanding enemies of the Mohawks who side with the French against the English), Magua is driven away from Mingo society because, in his words, he drank "the fire-water and...became a rascal" (Cooper 1984, 18). He eventually sides with the Mohawks, allies of the English, and is, subsequently, welcomed by Cooper's characters as a trustworthy Mohawk scout. However, Magua's impulse for drink cannot be suppressed, and this results in the English officer, Munro, ordering Magua's public whipping. Magua's lack of fidelity at this point is revealed in his quick plans to seek

revenge on the English. This includes convincing the English that he will return to the Hurons as a spy, all the while determined to assume a leadership role in his old tribe; force Munro's daughter, Cora, into servitude; and, most importantly, have Munro's "heart...within reach of the knife of le [Renard] Subtil" (Cooper 1984, 112).

Magua's ability to convince others of his sincerity is reminiscent of the articulateness of a Carwin or Ichabod Crane. Forged by a life of moving between communities, Magua's gift of elocution becomes the vehicle for his deceit. He is seen "gliding" into a scene, "speaking with his fatal and artful eloquence" (Cooper 1984, 202). His abilities give him a power similar to "a white general" and allows him to possess "an evil spirit that no power short of Omnipotence can tame...neither sounds nor language seem to touch his soul" (Cooper 1984, 251 and 261). His elocution lends to Magua a transformative ability that is to be feared, for it seems unnatural and insincere. He eventually turns this dangerous power on the Hurons, and his manipulation of the Huron tribe ultimately leads to its death and destruction at the hands of its enemies. Recognizing the ultimate fate of the Hurons in the final battle, Magua abandons them to their massacre and makes one final attempt to steal Cora away from the fight. The result is the tragic deaths of Uncas, Cora, and himself.

Like Cooper's other characters, Magua appears devoid of the transformative power of choice. Magua comes to the Mohawk tribe and the English as a Huron, and he leaves as a Huron, as if the whole affair might well have been predicted from the outset. No matter where he goes or what gifts and abilities he gains throughout his travels and experiences, he will not change. In Cooper's world, the unprepared warrior remains the unprepared warrior, despite the battles and hardships he endures; the innocent and



beautiful remain so, despite the massacres and atrocities they observe. People are knowable and definable as communities are knowable and definable. Cooper's individuals are—to use Michael Sandel's evocative term—radically encumbered selves. They come *situated* as members of their original communities. In the face of a glaring need for change, they remain constant; they cannot do otherwise.

The lessons of this rigidity in Cooper's narratives are striking. Individuals remain static representations of their original communities. As one student of Cooper has observed, his “characters think and act in accord with their communal affiliation; and while they may be themselves unaware of their group's history, they bear its identifying marks” (House 1965, 11). The choice to change community membership simply does not exist, and performance based attempts to change membership appear impossible and, in the case of Magua, not be trusted. This makes the boundaries between *us* and *them* more definable and recognizable. For Cooper, it lends a degree of certainty to what was otherwise a chaotic, ambiguous, and dangerous world. Indeed, the whole unfortunate series of events that led to the narrative's tragic end, including the deaths of Cora and Uncas, would have been avoided had the characters been capable of recognizing the inviolate rules of their communal inheritance. In a young republic struggling with its own identity, narratives of these sorts were powerful forces for constructing certainty in a dynamic set of social and political circumstances. Rather than embrace this social dynamism as a natural compliment to a burgeoning liberal society, these important touchstones of early American literature remind us of its danger.

## Conclusion

Challenging the dominant conceptions of citizenship in the early Republic, the present examination of early American romance reveals a view toward community inclusion that is not easily explained by liberalism's vision of citizenship as founded on the freely choosing self or the performatively earned citizenship of the civic-republican tradition. Instead, these narratives confirm, in part, what Rogers Smith (1997) found in his survey of the history of U.S. citizenship laws: early American views of community membership were strongly rooted in static, ascriptive, and observable community boundaries. Nevertheless, this, too, does not go far enough. It is not merely ascriptive features that permit belonging, as no amount of apparently desirable qualities can satisfy the requirement of original membership. This is the birthright citizenship of Edward Coke rather than the consent based view of John Locke. It is revealing of an early literature in close step with the small community ideology of insular communitarianism, which Kenneth Lockridge (1985) identified in early Dedham, Massachusetts and traced back to medieval England. Indeed, Cooper's static depictions of the self and inviolable sense of original individual identity stand in stark contrast to Locke's claim that "A child is born a subject of no Country and Government. He is under his father's Tuition and Authority, till he comes to age of Discretion; and then he is a free-man, at liberty what government he will put himself under; what body politick he will unite himself to" (Locke 1999, 347; Smith 1997, 79).<sup>6</sup> Counterpoised to Locke, we have the observation of Leatherstocking: "he who is born a Mingo will die a Mingo."

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the relationship between early Puritanism and its relationship to social order and communitarianism see, for instance, Rhys Isaac's (1971) review essay on the subject.

For Locke, political membership is artificial, rooted in choice rather than birth. To Leatherstocking, such a choice appears impossible, and attempts to contravene this reality must only end in ruin. Communities are natural rather than constructed; they are venues of certainty and familiarity whose disruption must be guarded against. In many ways, it has been this vision of Leatherstocking rather than Locke that has proven most resilient in the American political tradition. In *Federalist #2*, John Jay (1961, 6) made his claim for American union based on “one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, [and] very similar in their manners and customs.” Efforts to protect this “one united people” have proceeded on all these grounds: heritage, language, religion, customs, and values. From Federalist worries over French refugees to the Irish and Italian Catholics, the Chinese, and, more recently, Hispanic immigration, old arguments resurface to challenge *new* and *unique* threats to community.<sup>7</sup>

The American literary milieu, in particular, has been a repository for tales of the *other* and subsequent threats to the *us*. Mary Monk’s depiction of Catholic cleric life in *The Awful Disclosure* employed tales of lust and sex between nuns and priests to sell more copies than any American book until *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Monk 1836; Morone 2003, 194). Stephen Crane’s *Maggie, Girl of the Streets* was described as “too honest” by publishers for its depiction of immigrants as “insane demons” who scream “great crimson oaths” of “blasphemous chatter” (McGuire-Driver 2003). As embedded portraits of contemporary life, these narratives further elucidate the complex and evolving debate

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<sup>7</sup> In a controversial *Foreign Policy* article, Samuel Huntington (2004) made the case that Hispanic immigration poses a unique threat to a longstanding value-set Huntington calls the American Creed. For Huntington, this new immigration stands ready to usurp important inherited English and Protestant cultural foundations, including rule of law, individualism, egalitarianism, liberalism, and a distrust of government.

regarding community membership in America. It is a debate that has been as much a part of American literature as the struggle over citizenship laws within which community belonging is ultimately formalized.

Finally, because narratives have the ability to contain seemingly contradictory ideas and beliefs in the same framework (Reinarman 1987), stories and their manifestation in literature also hold great potential for crafting images of community even within the context of an expanding diversity. As indicated earlier, this ability to reconcile the imperative of inclusivity with the need to sustain a politically viable collective identity has been the great challenge of liberalism. Narrative's ability to accommodate multiple and even inconsistent claims in a single framework have proven to be a powerful force for affirming greater collective identity within a liberal American state (Frohock 1999, 103). Though the examples employed above have indicated instances where stories have sought to narrow the boundaries of community inclusion, J. David Greenstone (1993) described Abraham Lincoln's genius in employing a powerful liberal grammar in new and inventive ways in order to reconcile basic political tensions and rivalries. As Rogers Smith (2003, 187) has argued, American narratives have been most successful in affirming inclusion over narrower boundaries of political membership when they have focused on historical accounts of collective identity. This, too, was the approach of Greenstone's description of Lincoln. Whether inclusive or exclusive, however, the American literature has held a powerful voice in this discussion, providing a more honest and holistic appreciation of the relationship among America's multiple political traditions.

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