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Paulding's *The Dutchman's Fireside* and Early American Romance

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In his essay "James K. Paulding and the Foundation of American Realism," Louis D. Owens suggests that in the important essay "National Literature" as well as elsewhere Paulding argues for the kind of realism William Dean Howells hoped to develop at the end of the nineteenth century. Certainly Paulding's "National Literature" calls for America to write its own fiction. He attacks those authors who "have overlooked our own rich resources, and sponged upon the exhausted treasury of our impoverished neighbours," and he condemns those who argue that America has no materials for "romantic fiction." Although Paulding admits that America is without the "fairies, giants, and goblins" which are the stuff of "mere romance-writers," he notes that the history of the founding of America is "amply sufficient for all the purposes of those higher works of imagination, which may be called Rational Fictions":

The best and most perfect works of imagination appear to me to be those which are founded upon a combination of such characters as every generation of men exhibits, and such events as have often taken place in the world, and will again. Such works are only fictions, because the tissue of events which they record never perhaps happened in precisely the same train, and to the same number of persons, as are exhibited and associated in the relation. Real life is fraught with adventures, to which the wildest fictions scarcely afford a parallel; and it has this special advantage over its rival, that these events, however extraordinary, can always be traced to motives, actions, and passions, arising out of circumstances no way unnatural, and partaking of no impossible or supernatural agency.

Paulding's comments here speak unarguably for a fiction that adheres more closely to life than that of "mere romance-writers." At the same time, however, his description of the uses to be made of life is strikingly like those of professed romancers who saw their art as, essentially, shaping history to make its meaning readily understandable to the reader. As John Caldwell Stubbs has written, "the nineteenth-century romancer's professed goal was to order the random happenings of experience into artful patterns so that the reader could comprehend the experience—either intellectually or emotionally." Such a writer

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“should consider his ‘neutral ground’ bounded by historical facts. But within this boundary he may imaginatively picture his conception of human experience.”

Paulding’s high praise of Charles Brockden Brown’s fiction in “National Literature” makes it clear that he does not oppose romance as a form; rather, he opposes extreme or absurd forms of the romance and wishes fiction to be more closely “bounded by historical facts.”

Despite Paulding’s seeming movement toward realism in his criticism, his novel *The Dutchman’s Fireside* clearly utilizes elements of the romance. In fact, in his use of history and the frontier, as well as in the manner in which he develops characters and organizes elements of the plot, Paulding’s practice is certainly that of the early American romancer.

In writing *Fireside* Paulding was inspired by an account of the period, Mrs. Grant’s *Memoirs of an American Lady*, published in England in 1808 and in America a year later. An understanding of Paulding’s use of the *Memoirs*, however, is dependent upon an understanding of his attitude toward history. On January 1, 1835, Paulding wrote a letter to Dr. Daniel Drake in which he discussed history and fiction: “I do not think authentic History a proper basis for a novel. Tradition, or that species of History which belongs to the fabulous ages, or at least to a very remote period of obscurity, I should think much better. It would allow for alterations, additions, and embellishments, without violating the sanctity of truth for what nobody believes, and suffer no injury by being combined with fiction.”

Thus, while *Fireside* is a “historical novel” insofar as it uses Mrs. Grant’s *Memoirs* and insofar as it is set back in time some eighty years and incorporates “real” characters and incidents, Paulding does not wish to recreate historical events *per se*. Instead, Paulding develops a set of fictional characters and actions within a plausible historical framework distanced from the reader in time. He thus uses his “history” and the traditions and social customs of *Memoirs* primarily in order to circumscribe his own work, to set limits within which he can develop his fictional materials.

From numerous asides throughout the novel, Paulding’s affection for the eighteenth-century Dutch of the Hudson River Valley is obvious. In fact, his frequent comments that a particular custom or style belongs to an age that is past seem to evoke his letter to Dr. Drake. For Paulding, the period in which he sets *Fireside* obviously is “fabulous” insofar as it is lost forever, and he mourns its passing. As if in tribute he writes a fictional work, set in a specific historical context, in order to
preserve that life. But he is interested in more than mere history; he is interested in the meaning of the region's history. As an artist, he uses chronological distance to establish patterns of action that make the moral significance of the represented events apparent. The customs themselves are relatively unimportant, but what a custom means in human terms fascinates him. Thus, at least in *Fireside*, Paulding's view of history is firmly within the romance tradition. The supernatural is unnecessary; the plausible events and the social customs of the work have themselves a fabulous air, and they function to display character, to define moral behavior, and to demonstrate the meaning of a character's life and action much as Hawthorne's later Puritan community and scarlet letter would do. The central action of the novel is the maturation of Sybrandt Westbrook. In the course of *Fireside* Paulding traces Sybrandt from introverted bumbler to active, heroic public citizen. At the same time that he follows Sybrandt's development as an individual, he makes clear that he also views him as a representative man, a figure who embodies the growing spirit and strength of the American colonies.¹²

*Fireside* begins by introducing the Vancour family and generalizing about the character of the inhabitants of the Hudson Valley in the 1750s. The sturdy, plain, and thrifty Vancours are a product of their environment and way of life, and their behavior will serve as a measure against which the actions of outsiders, like British soldiers, can be gauged. While the area in which the Vancours reside is idyllic with its rich meadows, fertile lands, and graceful river, Indians reside "within thirty or forty miles, in almost every direction," and "this state of things contributed to keep up a warlike spirit and habits of dangerous enterprise among the early settlers, and they partook of the opposite characters of husbandman and soldier" (p. 35). Thus, Paulding presents an image of multi-faceted people, able to appreciate the serenity of nature while prepared to defend their way of life against attack. Simultaneously he points out that the seemingly idyllic world of the Vancours is subject to incursions from a wilderness that contains evil embodied in the person of the "savage."

Paulding goes on to make clear that in the Vancours he is not presenting rude American yeomen. They are people quite able to mingle with the fashionable people of the world:

In manners they might not be particularly distinguished from the polite and well-bred people of the world; but in habits and modes of thinking they were essentially different. There was a certain Doric simplicity in their mode of life, which has long since passed away, leaving behind what I sometimes feel inclined to doubt is but an inadequate compensation for its loss (p. 37).
In short, Paulding intends to present and explore character types he feels are vanishing. When Egbert Vancour is shown as the most worldly of the group, Dennis the most conservative and withdrawn, and Ariel as rather clownish and good-natured, the three demonstrate the variety of character found in the Hudson Valley in the 1750s. In this sense the Vancour brothers are very much like the characters of romance described by Richard Chase as "given quantities rather than emerging and changing organisms responding to their circumstances as these themselves develop one out of another."\(^{13}\) They belong to, and represent, an era of special values, and that era is fixed as they are, in fact is fixed by them, in the fiction.

Much the same can be said of the other characters. Mrs. Vancour, for example, along with most of the other women in the novel, is presented as vain, silly, and quite empty-headed. For a good deal of the novel even Catalina, the heroine, seems doomed to a career of vanity. The two Indians presented most clearly, Paskingoe and Hans Pipe, merely represent different shades of Indian character, and Paulding's fundamental view of them as revengeful savages is constant. The initial descriptions of Sir Thicknesse Throgmorton, a "'real John Bull'" (p. 180), and Colonel Barry Gilfillan, "a genuine Milesian" (p. 182), forecast their behavior, and they function mainly to illuminate the characters of Sybrandt and Catalina. Even Sir William Johnson, clearly one of the most romantically admirable characters, is presented not so much as a complex but as a "great" man. Though Paulding's high regard for Sir William leads to a somewhat fuller and more believable picture of him than of Throgmorton, ultimately Johnson is not much "deeper."

Only in the person of Sybrandt Westbrook does Paulding introduce anything like complexity of character. This is only logical, of course, since the novel revolves around Sybrandt's maturation, his testing and final emergence as a hero ready to assume the responsibilities of the coming generation. Even in Sybrandt, though, there is only the emergence of traits which have been buried beneath the stern lessons of his tutor, Dominie Stet Tinius; he sheds one set of beliefs, one code of behavior he has outgrown, in order to present to the world a new, more valuable, person.

*The Dutchman's Fireside* is divided into two parts. They are symmetrical in the sense that each involves, on Sybrandt's part, a crisis that precipitates a journey into the wilderness. The journeys are each presented as metaphorical descents into a beautiful though dangerous world in which the hero encounters a series of tests; he proves himself
in each, though the victories of Part One are necessarily temporary, thus necessitating the second journey. In each Paulding utilizes the image of knight with squire to confirm the mythic nature of the quest.

Sybrandt undergoes three trials in the first part of The Dutchman's Fireside, each of which produces alienation and finally resolves itself in a physical contest. Paulding emphasizes Sybrandt's shyness and diffidence since his central concern is to place an individual dominated by "his pride, timidity, and sensitiveness . . . in conflict with his fellows, under the incitements and temptations of the world" (p. 47). The element that serves to connect all the actions of the novel is Sybrandt's love for and attempt to win Catalina Vancour. In this sense it is the central quest of the plot. While the love interest is highly traditional, what Paulding does with it in the context of a developing America and America's attitudes toward the frontier is most interesting.

The first test of Sybrandt's character occurs at an outing arranged by Catalina. The island that is the site of the party is quite consciously presented in idyllic terms as a "little paradise . . . covered with a carpet of rich, luxuriant verdure, which . . . mingled with tufts of wild roses, and growths of nameless wild flowers of every hue . . ." (p. 58). Such a scene is surely what Northrop Frye had in mind when he described the "idyllic world" of romance as "a world associated with happiness, security, and peace; the emphasis is often thrown on childhood or on an 'innocent' or pre-genital period of youth, and the images are those of spring and summer, flowers and sunshine."14 In this pleasant scene Sybrandt is able to open up to Catalina. However, the idyll is shattered by a violent storm that shivers great trees, floods the island, and threatens the party-goers. In the presence of danger Sybrandt reveals his true character as he gathers his companions into a boat and "in the composure of unwed manhood, with a steady hand and a steady eye, [guides] the little skiff through roaring whirlpools and angry currents, furiously conflicting with each other, almost as skillfully as a veteran Mississippi boatman" (pp. 65-66). The contrast between the two states is crucial. While "realistic" in the sense that the coming storm is plausible, the swiftness and drama of the change is similar to the abrupt and disorienting changes of romance. Sybrandt and the others are moved in an instant from a paradise to a world of death and destruction, what Frye would call the "demonic or night world" of romance.15 Thematically, the episode foreshadows much of the later action of Fireside: when Sybrandt is cast into a demonic element, his energies are released; he breaks through his shell of selfishness and conquers his fears.
Sybrandt’s victory is only temporary, however, for his return to society means a retreat into himself. His misery increases when a garrison of redcoats appears and Sybrandt finds himself unable to compete with their commander, Colonel Sydenham, for the affections of Catalina. Increasingly alienated even in the idyllic setting of the Vancours’ estates, Sybrandt decides to venture into the wilderness:

In the days of which we are speaking, the young men bordering on the frontiers were accustomed almost universally to commence the business of this world with a trading voyage among the savages of the borders. Previous to assuming the port and character of manhood, it was considered an almost indispensable obligation to undertake and complete some enterprise of this kind, replete with privations and dangers. The youth went out a boy and returned a man, qualified to take his place among men, and to aspire to the possession of the object of his love (p. 83).

This trading journey is a rite of passage, an initiation into the affairs of men.16

Sybrandt is guided by an old black slave who knows the Mohawk language and who had accompanied Sybrandt’s uncle and guardian, Dennis, on his first trading expedition. The choice of Tjerck is especially fortuitous. As a man of a previous generation, a voice of experience and wisdom guiding the novice on his way, he clearly represents continuity. In addition, Tjerck’s status as a slave ensures that Sybrandt is always at the forefront, and this relationship in turn suggests that in Sybrandt lie the hopes of the older generation for the new: “So it was settled that old Tjerck should be the squire of our new errant of the woods and wilds” (p. 84).

When the trading voyage actually begins, Paulding adds a suggestive image. No longer is it merely a journey of knight and squire: “All things being ready, Sybrandt launched his light canoe on the smooth mirror of the Hudson, and assisted by the dusky Charon, old Tjerck, paddled away upwards, towards the sources of that majestic river” (p. 87). The image of Tjerck as Charon does at least three important things: it reemphasizes the mythic quality of the adventure, pushing it back in time and stressing the timelessness of the initiation rite; it suggests a new beginning across the Styx; and it suggests a descent to a new existence in the underworld.

Nature and the wilderness are not portrayed in themselves as hellish; indeed, the wilderness is again paradisal as civilization is left behind: “Nature displayed herself naked before them, and the innocent earth exhibited her beauties in all the careless, unstudied simplicity of our first parents, ere the sense of guilt taught them to blush and be
ashamed” (p. 87). The frontier does, of course, contain dangers such as wild animals, but the preeminent threat of the wilderness is figured in the Indian.

On this first voyage Westbrook encounters an especially dangerous Mohawk “called Paskingoe, or the one-eyed”: “He was a tall, athletic savage, six feet high, of a ferocious appearance and indifferent character. He had lost an eye in some drunken brawl; and having mixed a good deal with the white men, exhibited the usual effects of such an intercourse, in a combination of the vices of both races.” The Indian is thus “cunning, avaricious, and revengeful” (p. 89). In Paskingoe, and later in Hans Pipe, Paulding demonstrates that the civilization Westbrook has temporarily left has accentuated the worst aspects of the Indian’s character. Thus, in the hero’s encounter with Paskingoe he must strive against both natural evil (inherent, according to Paulding, in Paskingoe’s Indian nature) and the evils of civilization (the vices the Indian has adopted from the whites).

As is characteristic in the romance form, the actual physical conflict takes place in an isolated spot, here described as a web or trap. The knight and his “trusty squire” are led by a dangerous guide (Paskingoe) into a maze whose windings are “devious” and compared to “a vast serpent asleep in the high grass.” This representation of evil is heightened by “the pathless monotony of the vast meadows, which presented in the hazy obscurity of a cloudy day no distinct outline or boundary” (p. 91). The entire world in which they travel seems given over to the demonic. Sybrandt’s inability to see clearly, the lack of judgment that blinds him to immediate dangers, manifests itself in the absence of sunlight and subsequent obscurity of the landscape.

After they arrive at their destination, Sybrant begins to realize his predicament. Having given the Indians food, Westbrook is coerced into giving them rum, and, after a suitable debauch, the Indians are transformed into “yelling fiends” who rush Sybrandt “with foaming mouths and eyes darting fire” (p. 96). These Indians, drunk with rum and rage, represent evil incarnate, and their attack on Sybrandt is an attack by the forces of evil in nature unleashed by the corrupting influence of “civilization.”

Sybrandt kills Paskingoe, and he is rescued by the fortuitous appearance of Sir William Johnson just before he is overpowered by the remaining “fiends.” Johnson’s rescue of Westbrook marks the introduction of a teacher from whom Sybrandt can learn a new way of life; simultaneously it reaffirms Paulding’s belief in white superiority and final victory over the Indian. Johnson is a figure precisely the opposite
of Dominie Stettinius, the hero’s tutor while in civilization. Paulding doubles Sybrandt’s “instructors,” romance-fashion, to offer contrasting examples to the hero. Stettinius, learned but aged, and finally appalled by changes in the old ways in the Hudson Valley, goes back to the Old World; Sir William, living both metaphorically and actually on the frontier, is the consummate man of the New World. Johnson is presented as a hero whose accomplishments are mythic in scope. A man of intellect and education, he is also a man of great physical strength and stamina. He is a model for Sybrandt, and the hero’s movement from Stettinius to Johnson indicates his personal progress since Sir William finally embodies all that is best for the young American—and the young America. Paulding’s use of this kind of structural-thematic mechanism is characteristic of the romance.

Sybrandt goes home with Sir William to recuperate from his ordeal; his stay is a period of learning, though the lesson is a simple one: “Action, boy, action is the word...” (p. 108). While a life of action in the wilderness brings forth Sybrandt’s best traits, his return home to the Vancour estates once again makes him shy and awkward, especially in the presence of Catalina. His adventure in the wilderness fulfills the requirements of social custom—he has made a successful trading voyage—but it relieves his emotional problems only temporarily. At this point Paulding introduces a third test for Westbrook. Having successfully faced a savage Indian corrupted by whites in the wilderness, the hero is now pitted against a similar enemy in the “civilized” world.

Hans Pipe is another representative figure who, “in proportion as he lost the habits of the savage, acquired the vices of the civilized man, sharpened to a keener edge by the wild vigor of barbarism and the early absence of the habit of self-restraint” (p. 136). In short Pipe is a kind of Paskingoe brought from the woods to the agricultural countryside: “Perhaps a more worthless, dangerous and revengeful being never crawled upon the earth than this wretched outcast of the savage and civilized world” (p. 137). Linked to the serpent, Hans Pipe is another “fiend” of the demonic world.

Pipe plans to kill Catalina in order to revenge himself for what he sees as past wrongs. In the course of the Indian’s plottings, Catalina’s suspicions are aroused, and she conveys her fears to Sybrandt, who vows to protect her. At the same time both finally recognize their growing love for one another. Nonetheless, Sybrandt’s secret nocturnal vigils in which he keeps watch over Catalina are misinterpreted, and, as Sybrandt gains a reputation as a profligate and a sot, Catalina is to be sent off to New York to be protected from him. In the sense that
Sybrandt is increasingly alienated from his society, and is nightly exposed to danger, he lives in a demonic world. That is, the evil of the Indian’s revenge creates within the idyll the same characteristics manifested by Paskingoe’s threat in the wilderness.

Finally, just before Catalina is to leave for New York, Pipe makes his final attempt on her life. In a melodramatic scene Sybrandt slays the Indian. The pair of lovers is reunited, a complete explanation is made, and they declare their love; the idyll is restored. The episode is sentimental, exaggerated, and certainly not Paulding at his best, yet it does serve to advance the themes of *Fireside* in a fashion typical of romance since “the characterization of romance is really a feature of its mental landscape. Its heroes and villains exist primarily to symbolize a contrast between two worlds,” the idyllic and the demonic. Sybrandt’s physical valor reveals his moral strength and courage and thus confirms Sir William’s assertions that action should be Sybrandt’s primary concern. Most important, though, it reaffirms that in *Fireside* the demonic world need not be a separate place. While the earlier incident of the flooded island suggests that nature may be a source of danger, Paulding sees evil more often originating in man. The scene of Pipe’s death is an idyllic vale, but that vale is transformed by the Indian’s need for revenge.

Although Sybrandt and Catalina have declared their love for one another, Catalina must still go to New York. The result of Sybrandt’s three trials is only a partial victory; his love has declared herself, but he has not finally won her. Part Two of *The Dutchman’s Fireside* opens by following Catalina’s journey to New York and presenting the social scene of the colonial capital.

In terms of the plot of the romance as a whole, the significance of the New York section is that it once again complicates the love story. Catalina is to visit her aunt and uncle, the Aubineaus. Mrs. Aubineau is a flat character who typifies the colonial Anglophile, the person who believes “that the whole universe was a nest of barbarians compared with old England . . .” (p. 177). Naturally enough the aunt thinks little of Sybrandt Westbrook or his engagement to Catalina, and she immediately tries to arrange her niece’s marriage to an English officer or official to assure her social position, dignity, and (with luck) a title. Mrs. Aubineau’s first candidate, Sir Thickenes Throgmorton, is unsuccessful because he is dull, self-centered, and ill-tempered. The efforts of Colonel Barry Gilfillan, an emotional, gallant, and witty Irishman, are more successful, but Catalina, with Paulding’s approval, generally remains true to Westbrook. Still, Mr. Aubineau, aware of his wife’s
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scheming and heartily opposed to it, invites Sybrandt to New York to fight his own battle. His trip is a disaster. Even less prepared for city life than he was for frontier adventures at the beginning of Part One, Sybrandt is completely unsuited to the relatively effete life of New York.

Catalina comes to realize that, despite the poor figure her cousin cuts, she is still very much attached to him. Before she can tell him, though, a crisis occurs. Sybrandt discovers a miniature of Catalina in Gilfillan’s room (the latter has made a copy without permission); it is an affair of honor and a duel is proposed. Before the duel can be fought, war between France and England is declared; Gilfillan is off to the front lines, and Sybrandt leaves for Albany to join the war, telling Catalina that she is “free” as he departs.

Sybrandt volunteers to fight the French and their Indian allies as an aide to Sir William Johnson. His second journey to the frontier parallels the first in a number of significant ways. First, there is a squire-knight relationship. This time, however, Sybrandt goes as squire (student) to an established and heroic teacher, Johnson, who is specifically called “the knight” (p. 226). Second, because Sybrandt’s journey into the wilderness is once again precipitated by a crisis in his affair with Catalina, he again goes off to the wilderness to prove his manhood; the fact that he goes as a soldier demonstrates his need to prove himself Gilfillan’s equal. (The additional appeal to patriotism is important, for Sybrandt is of the generation that will live through the French and Indian War to fight the Revolution.) Once again, the journey into the wilderness is a journey in quest of self, a journey to establish a satisfactory and satisfying identity.

Shortly after arriving at Fort Ticonderoga, Westbrook is sent out to assess the strength of the enemy for Johnson. Sybrandt is to go among the French and their Indian allies accompanied only by “Timothy Weasel, the Varmounter,” a confirmed Indian-hater who has devoted himself to killing “kritters,” as he calls Indians, since his family was massacred (p. 227).

Weasel is an interesting romance figure in Fireside. As Frye points out, “the hunt is normally an image of the masculine erotic, a movement of pursuit and linear thrust, in which there are sexual overtones to the object being hunted.” He goes on to note that the image of the hunter pursuing an animal is never very far from a metamorphosis or changing of the hunter into an animal. In hunting Indians as if they were “kritters,” Timothy is himself in danger of reverting to a savage (animal) state, as his name implies. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that, while Sybrandt is carefully dressed and painted to look like an Indian, this was “an operation not at all necessary to Timothy;
his toilet was already made; his complexion required no embellishment" (pp. 229-30). For Sybrandt the journey with Timothy implies an initiation into a world he has never known. In his earlier slaying of Indians Sybrandt has been portrayed as a heroic white man; here he is introduced to a practitioner of violence who operates at a very different level. Moreover, the sexual overtones of the hunt are important, for Sybrandt's whole motivation for accompanying Johnson is to prove, after his apparent rejection by Catalina, that he is as much "a man" as Gilfillan.

Sybrandt and Timothy make their way into an Indian camp presented as the site of a debauch worthy of hell. The otherwise stereotypical scene is thematically significant because Sybrandt's courage, and thus his manhood, is established by a savage who is his foe. As he sits with a group of Utawas and Timothy extracts information from them, one of the chiefs suddenly rushes Sybrandt with his tomahawk. The latter remains absolutely unmoved, and the chief praises him saying, "he is worthy to be our brother. He shall go with us to battle tomorrow" (p. 235). In short, Sybrandt is pronounced equal in strength to the fiends of the demonic world by the fiends themselves.

The English refuse to heed Johnson's tactical advice, and they march out to do battle only to be ambushed as Johnson had predicted. Paulding concentrates on the heroism and common sense of the Americans, who do what they can to save their English allies. In the course of the battle, Sybrandt kills the chief of the enemy Indians, and Johnson, as heroic representative of the white characters, confirms the earlier Indian judgment of Westbrook's courage by promoting him to the rank of colonel. Thus, Sybrandt distinguishes himself in battle and attains a rank equal to that of Gilfillan, thereby seemingly accomplishing the purpose of his journey.

But Paulding must now find a way to integrate the two quests, for manhood and for Catalina. He does so by way of melodrama. Sybrandt selflessly rescues the wounded Gilfillan from an Indian, thus confirming the success of his quest for self-esteem and, more important, ensuring that he has not degenerated to the level of the savages he is fighting; he consciously rejects the Indian impulse of revenge when he saves Gilfillan. As the Irishman lies dying, he and Sybrandt are reconciled. The confusion over Catalina's affections is straightened out, and the stage is set for the denouement, the final recognition and proclamation of the love of Sybrandt and Catalina. In that encounter, each confesses his or her respective errors, and *Fireside* ends with a marriage.

The marriage of Sybrandt Westbrook and Catalina Vancour accomplishes several things. It marks the conquest of the demonic world by the hero since the central quest of the novel, for Catalina, is brought
to a successful close. Sybrandt’s trials are over; he has established his heroic identity and has been recognized as a hero by his community. The marriage itself, which Frye identifies with the casting off of the demonic, is a sign of that recognition. Thus, the marriage marks a reintegration of the hero into the society that he is (presumably) destined to lead. As Frye points out, the marriage at the end of a romance suggests the completion of a natural cycle and signifies harmony; the events that follow such a marriage are not within the scope of the romance. The marriage is a prophecy of hope for the young America; both Sybrandt and Catalina have overcome the obstacles of the English presence in America, and their union is a triumph of native aspirations over those of the English interlopers.

Although The Dutchman’s Fireside is free of ghosts, goblins, and dreary dungeons, it nonetheless owes a great deal to romance. Paulding’s characters are frequently the same two-dimensional types whose interaction suggests the clash of ideas more than conflicts between fully developed men and women. The plot of Fireside can be analyzed in terms of a series of quests which are ultimately derived from the pattern of earlier romances. Moreover, Paulding uses a symbolic landscape to image the obstacles to be overcome in the hero’s quest for identity; in particular, Indian characters function on both realistic and psychological levels, as credible dangers of frontier life and as external manifestations of the fears which beset the hero on his quest. Finally, Paulding uses the traditions and manners of the Hudson Valley Dutch to examine the threats of the “demonic” to a young and emergent civilization, America.

Notes


5Paulding, “National Literature,” p. 266.


7Stubbs, p. 29.
Studies in American Fiction


9Leland S. Person, Jr., “James Kirke Paulding: Myth and the Middle Ground,” WAL, 16 (1981), 39-54, discusses romance elements in several of Paulding’s fictional works, including The Dutchman’s Fireside, to argue that Paulding creates a “middle ground” in which frontier values and civilized life are integrated.


12As Michael Davitt Bell puts it, “the historical romancers who took their art seriously tended to develop their materials symbolically. Perhaps ‘representatively’ would be a better word (as the Emersonian hero was to be a ‘representative man’); characters and events, in historical romance, really are a part or example of what they represent, since history was itself regarded as, in a sense, a representation of moral truth.” See Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 6.


15Frye describes the demonic world as a place “of exciting adventure, but adventures which involve separation, loneliness, humiliation, pain, and the threat of more pain . . . . Because of the powerful polarizing tendency in romance, we are usually carried directly from” the idyllic world to the demonic or vice versa. See The Secular Scripture, p. 53.

16Frye contends that “in romance, essentially the whole human action depicted in the plot is ritualized action. The ritualizing of action is what makes possible the technique of summarized narrative . . . . which can move much more quickly than realism can from one episode to another.” See The Secular Scripture, p. 56.

17As examples one need only recall Natty Bumppo’s lonely battles with individual foes in Cooper or the climactic struggle in Moby-Dick to see that such patterns of isolated conflict are common.

18Interestingly, within a relatively short time of Westbrook’s return from the frontier instruction of Sir William, the slave Tjerck dies, suggesting that his role is over and a younger, more heroic figure is in charge. This appears to be a variation of the doubling technique described by Northrop Frye (The Secular Scripture, pp. 142-43). Instead of having a figure who is doubled with the hero die so that the true hero can go on, the guide dies so that a better teacher may become ascendant. In his Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), Frye discusses the role of the “tricky slave” in both comedy and romance; see pp. 173-74, 196-97.

19Frye, The Secular Scripture, p. 53.

20Frye, The Secular Scripture, pp. 104-06.
