

Historical Introduction

For much of 1842 James Fenimore Cooper was occupied in thinking and writing about ships, sailors, and the sea. On a modest scale, in October he published the first installment of his first experiment in magazine publication—a potential new source of revenue—the life of Richard Somers, the first of ten naval officers whose biographies were published in *Graham's Magazine* (1842–1845) and then collectively in 1846 as *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers*.¹ And on his customary large scale of a four hundred and fifty page novel—his main source of income—he published a pair of sea tales that year, *The Two Admirals* in the spring and *The Wing-And-Wing* in late autumn. *The Two Admirals*, which embodied a plot Cooper had first proposed to his English publisher Richard Bentley three years earlier, involved whole mid-eighteenth-century sailing fleets maneuvering and fighting in the English Channel.² *The Wing-And-Wing* imagines more modest sailing exploits, but within a far warmer sea and shore environment, the seacoast around Elba and Naples where in 1829 Cooper himself occasionally took the helm of a chartered sailing vessel.

But Cooper had also in 1842 to defend his past as well as write for the present. Much of his time was occupied with responding to politically-motivated Whig critics, for whom his 1839 monumental *History of the Navy of the United States of America* had become a favorite target. As early as 6 January 1840 Cooper had written to his closest friend, naval Commodore William Branford Shubrick,³ that he had no intention of altering his account in the *History of the Battle of Lake Erie* where he praised the conduct of the second in command, Jesse Duncan Elliott, regarded by some as failing to support his superior Oliver Hazard Perry at a crucial moment. More than two years of disputes between supporters of Elliott and Perry, fought out

in newspapers, pamphlets, and libel suits, led to Cooper's appearance in the New York City Circuit Court on 16 May 1842 in "the arbitration suit against William Leete Stone for William A. Duer's review of the *History of the Navy* in the *New-York Commercial Advertiser*." A pro-Cooper, anti-Whig newspaper, the *New York Herald*, saluted Cooper for providing there an "exhibition of literary talent, nautical knowledge, tact, and legal skill . . . such as has rarely been witnessed before in any Court in the country." Seventeen years later, Henry T. Tuckerman recalled in the *North American Review* Cooper's extended eloquence in re-fighting the battle of Lake Erie: "[F]or when he described the battle, and illustrated his views by diagrams, it was like a chapter in one of his own sea-stories, so minute, graphic, and spirited was the picture he drew. . . . He quoted [his own] 'Naval History' as if it were Blackstone; he indulged in reminiscences; he made digressions, and told anecdotes; he spoke of the manoeuvres of the vessels, of the shifting of the wind, of the course of the fight, like one whose life had been passed on the quarter-deck" (*L&J*, 4:282).⁴

But such a brilliant court performance yielded no income. As Cooper contemplated new revenues for 1842 from new novels, he may have been aware of increasing literary competition. 1842 saw the publication of Nathaniel Hawthorne's enlarged edition of *Twice-Told Tales*, Charles Dickens's *American Notes*, and Edgar Allan Poe's "Masque of the Red Death"; Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Essays, First Series* had appeared the year before.⁵ Cooper had begun his publishing career in 1820 and was entering his third and final decade of intense productivity; his two novels were his twentieth and twenty-first. With the exception of Poe, the other writers named were comparatively fresh voices—all of whom, with many lesser writers in America and England, were competing successfully with Cooper for the attention of the reading public.

Given these circumstances, along with continuing weakness in financial markets, Cooper found his usual Philadelphia and London publishers reluctant to take on *The Wing-And-Wing*, especially since *The Two Admirals* had not done particularly well in the marketplace. Cooper inquired on 15 May 1842 of Lea and Blanchard, the Philadelphia firm that had been publishing his work in America for sixteen years, "if you wish to purchase" his newest book:

The book will be called “Le Feu-Follet, or The Wing and Wing.” It is a sea story. Time 1799—scene Mediter[r]anean—actors principally English, French and Italians—though there is one American sailor. The hero Raoul Yvard is a Frenchman—The heroine, Ghita Carraccioli, an Italian. There is fighting and other marvels of the deep. I think it will be an interesting story.

And he added helpfully as a post script: “Feu-Follet is the French for Jack o’Lantern” (*L&J*, 4:289).

“[F]ighting and other marvels of the deep” did not elicit a favorable reply from Philadelphia three days later: business was generally bad and the sales of *The Two Admirals* uncertain. The publishers advised the author “to let the matter remain over two or three months by which time you will have the novel finished & the clouds which now hang over the business may break away & shew us a little sunshine.” They even hinted they would be happy for Cooper to find a new publisher: “You would then negotiate more advantageously with those you may select—As regards ourselves we certainly hope to be, by that time, in better spirits to enter into new enterprizes, at present we have very little disposition to do so” (*L&J*, 4:290).

Cooper’s approach to his London publisher, Richard Bentley, with whom he had worked since 1829, was scarcely more enthusiastic—on either side. Characteristically, Cooper informed Bentley on 27 May 1842 of his new work and named, rather than negotiated, a price of £200, admitting his ignorance of whether this amount covered past earnings or expected future ones. He explained simply that

This new work is the one alluded to in my last [of 11 February], and is called—

“*Le Feu-Follet; or The Wing And Wing.*”

It is strictly nautical, the scene is the Mediterranean, and the time, 1799. The principal actors are English, French, and Italian. One American. I rather like it myself. That is all I can say as to the character of the work (*L&J*, 4:292).

Like the Philadelphia publishers, Bentley responded on 8 July by frankly informing the author that his books were not selling as of old:

“the sale of your Works is not uniform, and . . . much depends upon the fancy and relish of the reading public here.” Furthermore, he had copies of *The Two Admirals* still on his hands, the title of the proposed new book was not “taking,” and the year 1799 with its adverse associations with the national hero Nelson, promised “to excite unpleasant feelings in the English reader.” Thus Bentley proposed that he determine the number of copies to be printed, offering Cooper a sliding scale of £150 for 500 copies to £500 for 1500 copies (*L&J*, 4:293).

Not discouraged, Cooper soldiered on; he needed the income. On 22 September Cooper wrote Bentley that *The Wing-And-Wing* “is now nearly printed, and I now send you more than half the sheets, with manuscript &c.” As was his custom, he sent two separate packages of printed sheets, to ensure against loss of one in transmission at sea, and he sent the manuscript (now regrettably lost) in the belief Bentley needed it to ensure British copyright. He then drew a draft against Bentley for “£150, at 90 days, making £400 for the whole book” (*L&J*, 4:315). Bentley, long used to Cooper’s demanding business negotiations, honored Cooper’s draft even though the author arbitrarily selected the payment linked to a print run of 1,250 copies.

A week later, Cooper began a letter of 29 September to “My Dearest Sue” from Philadelphia with “I wrote you I should be home this week. It is now doubtful. I have done much more than I contemplated at first, and am getting on well.” As usual, the letter is full of gossip about social events and on-going scandals, but does offer a glimpse at the “much more” work that he had accomplished: “I have sold the Autobiography [of a Pocket Handkerchief] to Graham, 50 pages for \$500. I shall finish it as soon as *Le Feu-Follet* is off my hands—but, I must come home to write the three last chapters” (*L&J*, 4:316). Presumably his presence in Philadelphia was to proofread what Fagan had so far produced of *The Wing-And-Wing*—all but the last three chapters. But his letter to Mrs. Cooper from Philadelphia on 2 October indicates he was still working there on completing the novel: “I have all but one chapter of *Feu-Follet* written, and half the second volume is printed. I am to be through here by Wednesday at latest—” (*L&J*, 4:319). In any case, the task of completing the novel and sending the final sheets to London he must have accomplished forthwith since on 23 November Bentley published

the work under a title and sub-title designed to promote sales: *The Jack O'Lantern*; (*Le Feu Follet*;) or, *The Privateer*.

By arrangement, Lea and Blanchard published *The Wing-And-Wing, or Le Feu-Follet; a Tale* a few days later on 28 November; Cooper had learned early in his career that British law granted copy-right on the basis of precedence in publishing, while American law granted it based on American citizenship (or for foreign authors, residence in the US) . Only in a letter of 10 January 1843 to his wife (*L&J*, 4:339), when admitting the new novel “has only done so so,” did Cooper advert to an “experiment” with pricing with his Philadelphia publishers, with Cooper paying for and owning the stereotype plates used to print the text.⁶ Doubtless responding to the “wait and see” response he had gotten from his long-term American publishers back in May, Cooper himself had paid for the stereotyping of the plates for the novel, a procedure he used subsequently for *Wyandotté* (1843) and the two parts of *Afloat and Ashore* (1844) in futile attempts to take on more direct oversight of the production process in return for greater profits. According to Beard’s summary (*L&J*, 4:340, n. 3) of their financial arrangements in the extant contract of 28 September 1842,

Lea and Blanchard paid \$1000 in two \$500 notes for printing the first 10,000 copies from stereotype plates furnished by the author. For each additional printing of 1,000 copies in a three-year period, Cooper was to receive .075 per copy. Should the publisher not reprint when his supply was sold, the copyright reverted to Cooper. Issued in two volumes in paper wrappings, the romance was sold at .25 per volume.⁷

The paper wrappings (more commonly, “wrappers”) and extraordinarily low price of fifty cents for two volumes illustrated the changing economics with much cheaper initial publications in the 1840s. In 1827, for *The Red Rover*, perhaps Cooper’s most popular and lucrative title—and a tale of the sea—Carey and Lea had paid \$5,000 for a publication run of 6,500 at \$1.50 for two volumes,⁸ with Cooper receiving more income for European and additional American sales. Beard notes (*L&J*, 4:436) that for the *The Wing-And-Wing* Cooper received from Lea and Blanchard \$1,187.50 but with a deduction for

the cost of stereotyping of the plates of about \$450, yielding a paltry American profit of \$737.50. This severe reduction in authorial profits, it should be noted, was not due to a severe decline in readership for Cooper's new works but to far lower sales prices in the more intensely competitive marketplace. The \$5,000 Carey and Lea paid him outright for *The Red Rover* was for an initial 6,500 copies (which soon sold out); *The Wing-And-Wing* had an initial printing of 10,000 copies but, selling at a price only a third of its predecessor, for all his management the new novel yielded Cooper less than 15 percent of what *The Red Rover* had brought him.

In turning once again to a sea story, Cooper perhaps wished to reawaken the enthusiasm his British publisher had shown for his sea fiction. Reflecting on the poor sales of Cooper's European travel books, Bentley had written the American on 19 September 1836 that "I look forward with much interest to the realization of the rumour, current among your friends here, that you are engaged in writing a new naval novel" (*L&J*, 3:222, n.3). On 5 February 1839 Cooper first suggested what would in 1842 become *The Two Admirals*: "I have had a plan for years, of writing a book, a tale, in which *ships* should be the only actors. What do you think of such a scheme" (*L&J*, 3:369). Bentley on 6 April 1839 responded negatively about "the tale which you propose to write in which there shall be no animal life," but hastened to steer the author in the direction of the sea: "Your home is on the blue waters—all acknowledge that in that class of fiction, although we have Marryat and Tom Cringle, you are at the head." Cooper had then immediately taken the nudge, and proceeded with *The Pathfinder* (1840), a project that would involve both maritime and Indian themes, or as Bentley put it in the same letter, "a naval story on your own inland Seas" (*L&J*, 3:370, n. 3).⁹

In the final paragraph for his 1842 Preface for *The Wing-And-Wing*, Cooper sought clearly to situate the new novel in the sea-fiction tradition he had established:

This is the seventh sea-tale we have ventured to offer to the public. When the first [*The Pilot*, 1824] was written, our friends confidently predicted its failure, on account of the meagreness of the subject, as well as of its disagreeable accompaniments. Not only did that prediction prove untrue,

as to our own humble effort, but the public taste has lasted sufficiently long to receive, from other quarters, a very respectable progeny of that parent of this class of writing. We only hope that, in the present instance, there may be found a sufficient family resemblance, to allow of this particular bantling to pass in the crowd, as one of a numerous family. (2)

Cooper was correct in placing the new “bantling” seventh in his sea-tales, but could not have foretold that he would write five more before his career was over.¹⁰

And in choosing Italy for his setting, Cooper may have hoped to find some deeper satisfaction: an imaginative return to the part of the world he had visited in 1828–1830 during his 1826–1833 European sojourn that he most loved and most often wished to return to. Re-immersing himself in fiction in the waters of the Bay of Naples may have helped salve the wounded feelings he must have felt over the cold reception he got when resettling in Cooperstown in 1836. Negative reviews of his two 1838 novels, *Homeward Bound* and *Home As Found*, had accused the Coopers personally of aristocratic condescension and worse, as imaginatively depicted in the Effingham family. Thus Cooper was engaged in a *second* set of libel suits which in late 1841 motivated him to write five long public letters printed in the New York City newspaper *Brother Jonathan* in which the author tried laboriously to distinguish between fact and fiction in the relationship between the real Coopers and the imagined Effinghams.¹¹

So: a grand escape from all this conflict to Italy!—at least imaginatively. As Cooper had reminisced with Horatio Greenough on 9 August 1836,

If my wife had not her strong family attachments, and a disinclination to move, I would return to Europe as soon as my affairs would let me. As it is, I look forward to such an event, for every one of my family feels much as I do on the subject. We may yet meet in Italy. Italy! The very name excites a glow in me, for it is the only region of the earth that I truly love. I tire of Switzerland, France I never liked, and Germany, though pleasant, excites no emotion, but Italy lives in my dreams. I think I hear now the Tuscan air, you used to hum for me (*L&J*, 3:233).

Appealing directly to the senses, the remembered melody revives the freedom of life (the “dolce far niente”) that so deeply riveted Cooper to the country.¹² The affections first created in Florence and Tuscany (the Coopers’ first protracted Italian residency from 21 October 1828 to late July 1829) were redoubled in the sea journey that, from the port of Leghorn, brought the Coopers on 5 August 1829 to Porto Ferrajo, the capital of Elba. Porto Ferrajo becomes the fictional site for the action in the opening chapters of *The Wing-And-Wing*—with overtones sketched in of the first exile of Napoleon in 1814. The Coopers made this voyage on a 25-ton felucca, the *Bella Genovese*, whose management Cooper at times jostled from the owner.¹³ Perhaps Cooper’s recollection of this sense of freedom and control contributed to his conjuring up the character of Raoul Yvard, another of his idealized roguish captains who outmaneuver their more powerful enemies—just as Cooper had defeated *his* in court.¹⁴

After visiting the Elban sites, the family returned to Civitavecchia in the Papal States on 6 August, and thence to Naples on 9 August. From Naples the family moved to Sorrento on 20 August, where they took residence in the Casa del Tasso, a dwelling nested on the edge of Sorrento’s cliffs and looking north to Naples and her Bay. The fabulous pleasures of Sorrento, Naples, Pompeii, and St. Agata resulted in a stay protracted until 24 November, after which the Coopers made their way leisurely to Rome.

The sea journey from Leghorn, the stay at Sorrento, and the excursions to the many attractions of Campania are described at length in *Gleanings in Europe: Italy* (1838). Four years before the publication of *The Wing-And-Wing*, and almost ten years after the Italian stay, the nine letters (XI to XIX) that cover the Neapolitan leg of the travel fill in the impressions sparsely recorded in the journals, marking an intermediate point between Cooper’s European tour and the use of those memories in *The Wing-And-Wing*. Mapped closely on the stretch of coast that goes from Tuscany to the borderline of Calabria, the travel book provides a blueprint for Cooper’s “seventh sea-tale.” In the novel, the French rover *Feu-Follet* and the British ship *Proserpine* follow step-by-step the route of *Gleanings*: from Elba, to the Bay of Naples, and down to the Sorrentine Peninsula, even to the gulf of Salerno, and to its extreme southern point near Castellabate

(the village named “Abate” in the novel); in letter XVIII of *Gleanings*, the author tells of the excursion to Salerno and on to Pæstum. If the sea voyages of the Napoleonic wars form the naval setting of *The Wing-And-Wing*, providing the very names of ships and commanders, the topography and landmarks inscribed by the anonymous letter writer of *Gleanings* shape not only the setting, but, also to some degree, the action of the book. And in between the Cape of Argentario in the Papal States and the Point of Campanella in the Sorrentine Peninsula, they give birth to the character of Ghita, a female personification of the delights of Neapolitan seas.

In his later writings, Cooper celebrated repeatedly the Mediterranean seascape, and returns to it in the 1851 authorial “Preface” to *The Wing-And-Wing*:

As for the Mediterranean, that unrivalled sea, its pictures always afford us delight. The hue of the water; the delicious and voluptuous calm; the breathings of the storm from the Alps and Apennines; the noble mountain-sides basking in the light of the region, or shrouded in mists that increase their grandeur; the picturesque craft; the islands, bays, rocks, volcanoes, and the thousand objects of art, contribute to render it the centre of all that is delightful and soothing to both the mind and the senses (4.26–33).

The picture acquires new focus when, at the beginning of chapter XIII, the narrator invites readers to stand at the mouth of the Bay of Naples as a means to bring them aboard the *Foudroyant* and in front of Nelson. At that moment, the vision changes dramatically and the bay begins to speak of a marine history—past and current—of conflicts, skirmishes, and death. Power in Italy in the late eighteenth century was fragmented among Austria, where the Austrian Emperor’s brother ruled Florence and its dependents—including Elba; the Papal States; and southern Italy, the Neapolitan States, ruled by Spain but contested by France, who in turn had the British fleet led by Nelson in opposition. In 1799 the French occupied Naples and the Neapolitan Jacobins had given life to a brief Republican season inspired by the French Republic: the “Neapolitan Republic.” At the fictional time of *The Wing-And-Wing* the Republic has just been overthrown by loyalists,

and Nelson is getting ready to order the summary execution of Francesco Caraccioli (1748–1799). A well-beloved admiral of the Neapolitan navy, Caraccioli had been in the service of the Neapolitan Spanish King, Ferdinand IV, but had switched to the French side when the Republicans had temporarily deposed him in early 1799.¹⁵ Captured by Royalist and British forces, Caraccioli's summary execution was carried out ostensibly by desire of the deposed king but by Nelson's direct orders. In the following years, the execution was regarded by many, especially Italian patriots, as a particularly detestable manifestation of Nelson's annulment of the concordat signed in June by Cardinal Fabrizio Ruffo, on behalf of King Ferdinand IV, and by Captain Edward Foote for the British force. The concordat guaranteed that the republican garrisons of Castel dell'Uovo e Castel Nuovo would go undisturbed if they surrendered. Nelson struck down the capitulation and had all those surrendering arrested and handed over to the king's justice, and to indiscriminate, and sometimes savage, executions.¹⁶

Perhaps wary of the court's desire for revenge, Caraccioli had fled from Castel dell'Uovo when Ruffo had entered Naples, but was captured and brought to Nelson's flagship, the *Foudroyant*, to be immediately and ignominiously put to death. In the novel, the narrator aligns with the observers who considered the execution of Caraccioli as a stain on Nelson's otherwise unblemished career, and Cooper makes clear in several places in the text (e.g., 216.24) that Captain Cuffe and other British officers regard the affair as a blot on Nelson's reputation. As in *The Two Admirals*, *The Wing-And-Wing* seems to be following Robert Southey's *Life of Nelson*, a work that Cooper did not like but certainly knew.¹⁷ Southey defines the facts of Naples as "the only blot upon [Nelson's] public character," retracing the whole of Caraccioli's affair, from the hasty trial and ignominious hanging, to the surfacing of Caraccioli's body not far from the *Foudroyant*, and under the eyes of a terrified Ferdinand IV.¹⁸

Most importantly, Southey singles out Lady Hamilton as the corruptor of the admiral, "an infatuated attachment—a baneful passion, which destroyed his domestic happiness, and now, in a second instance, stained ineffaceably his public character," and states that the Lady was on board the *Foudroyant* in the Neapolitan

Bay, even if she did not show up at the time of Caraccioli's trial.¹⁹ *The Wing-And-Wing* embraces both statements. The authorial preface figures Lady Hamilton as the instigator of Nelson ("the unprincipled woman who then governed him with the arts of a siren" 5.4–5), and in chapters XIII and XIV she actually presides over the visit of Ghita, serving as the figure of arrogant and deceitful power. Ghita, disclosed as the daughter of Caraccioli's natural son, pleads unsuccessfully with the Lady that her grandfather not be executed by hanging like a common criminal. Though Cooper never states that the English beauty is Nelson's mistress, the scene (195.1–201.7) leaves no doubt about her power over the admiral. Lady Hamilton's undue influence complements the British exertion of power on free sailors impressed into the royal navy. And the New Hampshireman Ithuel Bolt's impressment, which resulted in his hatred of all things English and his service in the French privateer, is a further reminder of how might trumps right in corporate England. Here, in 1842, Cooper is refighting in fiction the war of thirty years earlier as well as his own distaste for impressment acquired from fellow seamen during his service on the *Stirling* in 1806–1807.

Confrontation with the British navy governs the surface plot of *The Wing-And-Wing* from Elba to Ithuel's final escape, but on a deeper level the British are not the target. For example, Nelson's breach of Ruffo's concordat, an event Cooper was certainly aware of, is not even footnoted.²⁰ To the contrary, the author/narrator dramatizes the historical events of 1799 by superimposing on Caraccioli's drama the fictional "private history" of his grand-daughter, Ghita: a liberty for which there is "no other authority . . . than that which we share in common with all writers of romance" (4.36–37).

The privilege to choose romance over history deflects not only the English discussions on Nelson, but also Italian memories of the Neapolitan Republic. Backed by the French army, the Republic of 1799 had been a republican experiment that must have seeped through in the years immediately prior to the French revolution of July, and to the 1830–1831 "moti" ("uprisings") against absolutism and for independence in central Italy.²¹ Naturally, the histories of Naples were not focused on Nelson; and they were even less interested in making allowances for the British admiral, who was generally tagged as a brutal repressor. As it was to be expected, authors touched also

on Caraccioli's execution. In his influential *Historical Essay on the Neapolitan Revolution of 1799*, for instance, Vincenzo Cuoco questions the reasons for the Republic's failure, which he ascribes to the incapacity of highbrow Neapolitan Jacobins to speak to the heart of the under-classes of Naples (the "lazzaroni"). But he is also impassionedly concerned about the fate of the rebels and, among them, of Caraccioli. The *Essay* praises Caraccioli's outstanding naval skills, and labels Nelson a coward who yielded to the jealousies and envies of the court. Interestingly, there is no mention of Lady Hamilton, but Cuoco accepts, and tells in detail, the story of the surfacing body, adding that the event restored Caraccioli to popular love and reverence after his recovery and burial.

Pietro Colletta's *History of the Kingdom of Naples, 1734–1825* imputes the misfortune of Caraccioli to Nelson's envy for the other's higher naval skills and fortunes, as well as to the English admiral's shameful love affair with Lady Hamilton ("la fatal donna").²² His words are harsh: "But he, who was destined to more shame by his ill fortune or blind passion, only desired to have his rival in his hands in order to satiate his vengeance upon him" ("Ma questi che sua mala fortuna e cieco amore avevano destinato alle vergogne, volle in mano il rivale per saziarsene di vendetta"). Possibly Cooper crossed paths with Colletta, who was in Florence between 1823 and 1831, working on the book and contributing to the Viesseux Cabinet, the liberal club which Cooper attended regularly; Colletta was edited posthumously by Gino Capponi, whom Cooper had met at the Cabinet. And yet, his portrayal of Nelson is far from Colletta's rendition. Carlo Botta's *History of Italy during the Consulate and Empire of Napoleon Buonaparte* was translated into English in 1828 and may well have been known to Cooper. In the section devoted to Naples, Botta does not name Caraccioli but blames Nelson, and the influence of Lady Hamilton, for the betrayal of the concordat and the gory massacre of the garrisons of Castel dell'Uovo e Castel Nuovo.²³ Here again Nelson emerges as a far worse and flatter character than *The Wing-And-Wing* makes him.

Of course, in 1842 Cooper's Italian years were far behind, and memories of the political conversations taking place in Florence must have been fading away. And, even if he remembered the legend narrated in Italy of the Neapolitan admiral, both in writing and orally, he might

have been willing to disentangle himself from a debate on Nelson's responsibilities that could touch a sore spot with his British readers. The novel's treatment of Nelson as the preeminent representative of his country realized Richard Bentley's concern in his letter of 2 July that the time period would "excite unpleasant feelings in the English reader." The authorial choice not unduly to disparage the admiral proved astute since, in its review of the 1851 Putnam revised text, the *Southern Quarterly Review* indeed praised the novel for the very plot elements Bentley feared: "The episode, which includes the cruel fate of Caraccioli, the Italian Prince, a victim to the weakness of Nelson, and of the evil influence upon him of Lady Hamilton, is well conceived and highly touching."²⁴

Behind preoccupations with the English reception, however, the present editors see a deeper structural reason for evading the entangled context of the Neapolitan Republic. The targeted historical background of the novel is wider, if somewhat less focused, than the June 1799 events in the Bay of Naples. In the background is the contest between France and England for supremacy in the Mediterranean, and the governing subtext of *The Wing-And-Wing* is the ideological position of Raoul as a revolutionary—and atheist—dedicated to the service of France and of Napoleon. Though Napoleon never appears in the novel, his presence is felt through Nelson's frustrating the French invasion of Egypt in the 1798 Battle of the Nile, the pro-monarchical Neapolitan counterrevolution that followed the fall of the Neapolitan Republic, and the preview of the Emperor's later exile to the modest palace in Elba occupied by the novel's Vice Governor Andrea Barrofoli. And though Cooper acknowledged Napoleon's virtues in reforming laws in France and Italy, the author roundly condemned the Emperor in a public letter from France published on 24 March 1827 in the *New-York Commercial Advertiser* (with whose editor he was then on friendly terms):

There does not seem to me to be any positive attachment to the despot in France; all the liberals, call him, openly, what he was, a tyrant. As the deception created by the bustle and delusive glory of his reign subsides, they open their eyes to his faults, and wonder at their own folly. Napoleon had but few personal friends: he lived for himself; and a selfish man may

be feared and courted, but he cannot be loved. So long as he possessed the power and the will to contribute to the advancement of his dependants, self-esteem might induce the latter to believe that they adored him, but when he stands in the naked deformity of his nature, the affections find no place to repose on, in the bosom of a man who would sacrifice all or any to his own particular views (*L&J*, 1:197).²⁵

Raoul Yvard shares Napoleon's energy and daring, though mixed with finer qualities, especially his love for Ghita; but the very quality that separates them, his rejection of a personal God, as Cooper asserts in the 1851 preface, derives from the Enlightenment principles that Cooper, like others, viewed as contributing to the Reign of Terror. Cooper intends us fully to admire Raoul for his audacity, a quality shared by all Byronic sea heroes such as his own Red Rover of 1827. But he also observes of Raoul, as doubtless he thought of Napoleon, that "reckless daring was his vice, rather than his virtue" (39.30).

While the setting in Italy may have attracted his nostalgic recollections, the 1799 historical subtext of the novel, the looming presence of Napoleon, and the treatment of Nelson as a toy in the hands of Lady Hamilton disclose a political realist on the road to embracing orthodox Trinitarian Christianity as the only escape from human sinfulness. Politically, the novel invokes the conflict between revolutionary, atheistical, post Reign of Terror France, and England, its mortal enemy especially at sea. The brutality of this conflict, however, is somewhat softened by the genial setting in two locales of pre-Risorgimento Italy where the contending sea forces battled for control throughout 1799: first, in and around the island of Elba, and later, in Naples and its bay, then under its Spanish king.

These complex political events undergird how religious faith—its presence, absence, or perversion—thematically complements the contest between Napoleonic France and aristocratic England. "Our chief concern, on the present occasion, is on the subject of the contrast we have attempted to draw between profound belief and light-hearted infidelity" Cooper wrote in his 1842 Preface (2.15–17). Just as Raoul espouses "light-hearted infidelity," Ghita embodies "profound belief" a depth of faith and feelings that Cooper admired in the Italian lower

classes, and had already represented in the characters of his 1831 novel *The Bravo*: Antonio, Gelsomina, and even the Bravo himself.

In the debate about God between Ghita and Raoul, Cooper's epigraph for the novel from Young's *Night Thoughts* takes on its fullest import:

Know
Without star, or angel, for their guide
Who worship God shall find him.

Ghita's faith is intuitive, requiring no guide but her heart; Raoul analyzes religion like an Enlightenment rationalist. Thus in Chapter XI Raoul argues that his reason demands that "there is a power to govern all this, Ghita—but I maintain that it is a principle; not a being, in our shape and form. . ." (163.31–32). Cooper clearly sides with Ghita in the debate when she argues God "is the creator of the principles of which thou speak'st" (164.29–30); their discourse occurs as they gaze at the starry heavens, that ageless topos for questions of divine order. Cooper carefully parallels this scene with Raoul's death in Chapter XXX, another night-time scene under brilliant stars. Raoul's last words to Ghita of a "star [that] haunts me" which "some all-powerful hand must have created" (429.24–25) thrill Ghita with the possibility of his deathbed conversion. But even though he now has a star as a guide, his conversion is never made clear. Immediately after this utterance, he dies, oblivious to her joy and leaving her to the convent to pray incessantly for him.

Though not as developed as Raoul's atheism or Ghita's fideism, Ithuel Bolt's born-again hypocrisy rounds out Cooper's contrast of how religious belief informs action. Bolt is in the lineage for Cooper of both the versatile New England sailor he first embodied in Long Tom Coffin from *The Pilot*, and of the shrewd, self-serving Puritanical hypocrite first depicted in Jason Newcome of "The Littlepage Manuscripts." Bolt bolts from the scene of Raoul's destruction, sailing on a captured felucca to Marseilles where selling his prize enables him to return to his Puritan homeland in the Granite State; in the novel's penultimate paragraph Cooper reports him as marrying a widow and "experienc[ing] religion" to become "an active abolitionist, a patron of

the temperance cause, tee-totally, and a general terror to evil-doers, under the appellation of Deacon Bolt” (436.15–18).²⁶

Not surprisingly, one of the first assessments of the success of the novel came from the author himself. As noted before, Cooper wrote his wife on 10 January 1843—about seven weeks after the novel appeared in late November—that

Wing-And-Wing has only done so so. It is well received, but the sales but little exceed one half of what they ought to be. About twelve thousand copies have been sent off. I consider the experiment [the leasing arrangements for the plates Cooper paid for] a failure, though we may sell five thousand more. The season is against us. We should have done better, in the summer (*L&J*, 4:339).

Cooper’s assertion that the novel “is well received” must have derived from personal communications with friends rather than the sales figures he laments. On 6 December 1842 Shubrick wrote Cooper that

I have just finished reading *Le Feu-Follet* to the Ladies [,] that is to Mrs. Shubrick and her two nieces who are staying with us just now. . . . They like the book very much but prefer *Two Admirals*. They think it quite wrong in you to kill Sir Smees [Raoul Yvard], that he should have been converted and married to Ghita—You must settle that point with them (*L&J*, 4:329, n. 3; source in YCAL).

Cooper replied on 17 December that “I am of your opinion, that *The Two Admirals* is the best book. Sir Jarvey and Admiral Blue, are great favorites of mine, and twenty Raoul Yvards can not put their noses out of joint with their papa.” But he added, always confident that his most recent book was his best and would do well with the public, that “[s]till, I am inclined to think *Wing and Wing* the greatest favorite with the public.” Responding to killing off Raoul, Cooper stated his position clearly: “As for marrying Ghita to that atheistical scamp, Raoul, the ladies must excuse me. I preferred killing him, and putting her in a convent! My wife and my sister—a couple of tolerant christians they are!—say that I have been too liberal with the catholics” (*L&J*, 4:328). Although mildly jocular, Cooper’s disapproval of his

ladies touches on the unconventional and unprejudiced interest in the rituals, organization, and sensuous visual expression of the Catholic Church that placed him on the far side of much American stereotyped view of Catholicism: friends and family often at the other extreme.²⁷

In the same week Cooper wrote to Shubrick he sent a long letter summarizing his career to Rufus Wilmot Griswold, editor of *Graham's Magazine* with whom, as noted before, he was making arrangements for contributions:

Wing And Wing is just out, and is well recieved [sic]. How highly it is appreciated may be seen in the circumstance that it is called a work of immoral tendency. Its proper place in the naval series is <fourth, in my own opinion> about fourth, though, as to popularity, it is likely to stand second, or third (*L&J*, 4:345).

None of the reviews recovered by the present editors considers the novel "a work of immoral tendency," which we assume is a reference to the hero being an atheist. Indeed, most reviews, American and British, praised Cooper for setting the pious Ghita against "that atheistical scamp, Raoul." National differences emerged strongly among the reviewers on one point, however, with the British commenting at length on how Cooper depicted their seamanship and their greatest naval hero, while American reviews commonly ignored these issues.

Notices of the new novel began appearing as early as 17 October, a full month before publication in New York. For example, on that date the *Newark Daily Advertiser* carried the following notice, copied from another source:

Mr. Cooper's new sea tale is, we learn, by the U. S. Gazette, to be called the Wing and Wing, or Le Feu-Follet (Jack o'the Lantern). The scene lies in the Mediterranean. The publishers Messrs. Lea & Blanchard, have concluded to put it at a price that cannot fail to command an extended sale.—Heretofore the new novels of Mr. Cooper have been sold at from one dollar and fifty cents to two dollars per copy. This one will be sold in every section of the country at fifty cents per copy, in book form in two volumes.

The revolutionary low price of the new novel would be very favorably remarked on in many of the subsequent notices and reviews. On 24 November the Washington newspaper *The Globe* reprinted a brief notice from the *Baltimore Sun* heralding the new novel by the author who “was among the first in his line to compel trans-Atlantic respect for American literature; and though, as an author, he has been much abused at home, he has not, on that account, lost anything in foreign estimation, nor in the respect or admiration of the unprejudiced in his own country.”²⁸

Reviews at least claiming to have read parts of the novel appeared as early as 17 November, eleven days before the publishers made the whole book generally available. *The Alexandria Gazette* on 17 November reprinted a brief review from the *Boston Transcript*, based on being “favored with a few proof sheets” of the novel, from which the reviewer gleaned the outline of the love story between “a French unbeliever” and “a lady of fixed religious belief.” These few proof sheets elicited a handsome puff: “So far as we can judge from the specimen sheets above referred to, the production must be one of deep interest, much more so than the late novels of Cooper, and rendered additionally effective by the beauties of language and imagery made to bear upon its construction.”²⁹

“The Sea is, in the opinion of many, Cooper’s element, and his best friends divide their admiration between his sketches of incidents connected with the Deep, and his life-like presentations of Forest Life” began a review in Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* on 22 November. Since Greeley was a leading Whig editor, he could not qualify as a best friend to Cooper, but his reviewer’s admittedly very cursory reading highlighted the “most touching and well-drawn contrast” between the views of Raoul and Ghita before reprinting large excerpts of the scene of Caraccioli’s execution and the lovers’ final scene leading to Raoul’s death.³⁰

The *Brother Jonathan* review of 26 November—two days before general release—stuck to generalities that could have been formulated without reading a word of the new novel. After listing Cooper’s deficiencies—his “monotonous round of never varying incidents,” “his feebleness in seizing and individualizing character,” “his dim conception of the power and beauty and sublimity of the soul of woman,” and his

“incongruous and intertwined plots, which seem to be patched up as he goes along,” the reviewer surprisingly affirmed his fondness for the author, for Cooper is “since Scott, incomparably the most vivid and graphic of all living delineators of natural scenery.” Cagily, the review concluded that “when novels in two beautiful volumes are published at fifty cents a copy,” readers can well afford to buy their own copies and make their own judgments.³¹

More substantial reviews began to appear in December. On the first of the month, the *United States Magazine & Democratic Review* demonstrated a clear overview of the plot and of the three principal characters, Raoul, Ghita, and Ithuel Bolt, a “specimen of Yankeeism in one of its least amiable forms.” The review also recognized Cooper’s swipe at Washington Irving, which, as noted in the “Textual Commentary,” Cooper deleted in his Putnam revised text. *The Northern Light* reviewer, also on 1 December, presented the basic plot and, as did many fellow reviewers, approved of “the grave moral lesson” conveyed by the thwarted romance. But the review concluded by setting Cooper’s “prairie and forest” tales above his sea scenes: “No writer has ever painted the wild scenes of our wild land, and the anomalous character of those that swept the way for the onward progress of civilization and refinement with greater truth to nature.”³²

The *New-York Mirror’s* “Literary Notices” on 3 December offered an uncritically favorable overview of the romantic characters of the book, and of the exciting sailing and fighting at sea: “All Mr. Cooper’s pet vessels are exceedingly trim, graceful and beautiful, and sail six knots to another’s five.” On 7 December the New Orleans *Times Picayune* handsomely acknowledged the new novel but confessed “we have not had time to read it, but when Mr. Cooper writes of the sea he is ever magnificent.” Their notice ended with a recommendation to purchase (at the new low price) “the work of an acknowledged master.”³³

The short review in the *Southern Patriot* of 17 December mixed praise for Cooper’s plot, characters, scenery, and love affair with the criticism (probably felt by other readers, then and now) that his two Italian functionaries on Elba are “decided bores, and of course very annoying to the reader.” And alone of the reviews the present editors have seen, the *Southern Patriot* will have none of Cooper’s studied contrast of free thinking and religious fervor: “A large part of the

dialogue on religious topics carried on between the lovers is better fitted for two metaphysical disputants.”³⁴

Not surprisingly, *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, edited by Cooper's new editorial and literary friend, Rufus Wilmot Griswold, on 21 December declared the new novel, “from a cursory examination . . . equal to Mr. Cooper's most celebrated naval romances.” Alone among the reviews we have seen, *Graham's* devoted considerable length to that “shrewd Yankee” Ithuel Bolt, paraphrasing perhaps with a sense of Cooper's own tongue in cheek in mind, the novel's conclusion where Ithuel marries well, and “is said at the present moment to be an active abolitionist, a patron of the temperance cause, and a terror to evil doers, under the appellation of Deacon Bolt.” Similarly, *Godey's Lady's Book* on 1 January proffered a bland favorable notice of the latest novel from “this accomplished novelist once more upon his favourite element.”³⁵

In sum, the American reviews identified by the present editors seem largely perfunctory, satisfied to sketch the plot and characters, and perhaps recommend the new novel for its setting and naval action; nothing in the book provoked strong reactions (or in some cases, a careful reading before reviewing). The early British reviews were little different, though more likely to register an opinion about how Nelson individually and the British navy collectively were treated. The review from *The Athenæum* on 3 December began by challenging the author's assertion in his Preface that interest in the sea-novel is inexhaustible: “[T]he detail of marine manœuvres in this novel is a bit prosy, and. . . the narrative of the chase, to which, as usual, a large part of the present story is devoted, does not make heart beat and blood rise, as the earliest of those by which Mr. Cooper won his post-captaincy among the novelists.” And “once again we have Nelson and his enchantress served up,—this time very coldly.” In contrast, the *Caledonian Mercury* on 3 December concluded a run through the plot with the (inaccurate) recommendation to read the book “in which our gallant Nelson occupies a prominent part.”³⁶

The Monthly Review of January 1843 serves up a variation of *The Athenæum's* opinion on Nelson's treatment: “clever but coldly.” Nonetheless, its overall opinion of the novel is warmly favorable to the romance and to the plot, which it regards as quite plausible. Most