

## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The publication of the *Spy*. . . was an event. . . the first practical reply to a sarcasm,<sup>1</sup> which since that day, has found its ample refutation. . . . The efforts of a nation at performance,—particularly in letters and the arts must first be preceded by a certain consciousness of the necessary resources. This consciousness, in the case of America, was wanting. . . . To Mr. Cooper the merit is due, of having first awakened us to this self-reference.—to this consciousness of mental resources, of which our provincialism dealt, not only in constant doubts, but in constant denials. The first step is half the march. . . .

William Gilmore Simms, 1842<sup>2</sup>

Few important novelists could claim a more unlikely, ungainly or bizarre apprenticeship than James Fenimore Cooper. A former naval officer, outwardly a prosperous gentleman farmer preoccupied with civic and commercial interests, he catapulted into authorship unexpectedly in the spring and summer of 1820 at the age of thirty-one by his perpetration of a series of naïve but energetic imitations of fiction by then-popular British women. The inadequacy of these initial efforts soon became disconcerting to Cooper, though not before he was committed to publication of at least one of them—*Precaution*, the most ambitious of the efforts. He then wrote *The Spy*, which, because it "produced a sensation which ran with electric speed through every state of the Union,"<sup>3</sup> confirmed a profession for the financially desperate

New Yorker. He had apparently begun in the spirit of a parlor game, and in the light of his unanticipated success, would doubtless have preferred that the earlier imitations be forgotten altogether.<sup>4</sup> On 14 March 1825, he inscribed in a first English edition of *Precaution*: "To Charles Wilkes Esquire who alone knows the secret history of its authorship, this book is presented by his obliged friend, James Cooper."<sup>5</sup> Despite his life-long disparagement of his initial forays into authorship, he was perhaps referring to the financial morass out of which they showed an escape, for Charles Wilkes was Cooper's banker and early literary advisor.<sup>6</sup>

I.

The earliest known mention of these experiments, a reference to *Precaution*, is found in a letter to the New York publisher Andrew T. Goodrich, dated Scarsdale, 31 May 1820, marked "*Most-Strictly confidential*" and seeking "some mechanical information that may regulate the size of my volumes":

The arrangements for the late election and the subsequent death of the Mother of Mrs. Cooper having compelled me to remain at home for the last two or three months—For the double purpose of employment and the amusement of my wife in her present low spirits—I commenced the writing of a moral tale—finding it swell to a rather unwieldy size—I destroy'd the manuscript and chang'd it to a novel—<sup>7</sup>

Cooper's allusion to a "moral tale," in contradistinction to a "novel," suggests strongly that his first fictional effort was not *Precaution*, but a short work or "tale," like his "Imagination" and "Heart," stories imitative of the "moral tales" of Mrs. Amelia Opie. These he gave outright to the printer Charles Wiley as a financial assist and published for the latter's sole benefit in 1823 as *Tales for Fifteen* over the pseudonym "Jane Morgan."<sup>8</sup>

On 12 June 1820, only two weeks after the letter to Goodrich announcing *Precaution*, Cooper reported its completion "with satisfaction"; and on 28 June, he made a further disclosure:

The indisposition of one of my children, has prevented my seeing you, and by persuasion of Mrs. Cooper I have commenced another tale to be called the "Spy" scene in West-Chester County, and time of the revolutionary war—I have already got about Sixty pages of it written and my female Mentor says it throws *Precaution* far in the back-ground—I confess I am more partial to this new work myself as being a Country-man and perhaps a younger child—it will not be done however these three months at least as I propose making it somewhat longer than the last—The task of making American Manners and American scenes interesting to an American reader is an arduous one—I am unable to say whether I shall succeed or not—but my wife, who is an excellent judge in every thing but her partiality flatters me with very brilliant success—.<sup>9</sup>

Implicit here is the fascination and imaginative involvement that mark Cooper's swift transition from facile imitation, culminating in *Precaution*, to genuine creativity. On or about 8 July he confided to Goodrich, "I wish the work [*Precaution*] push'd through the press—It is so—very—very—inferior to the 'Spy' that I have lost most of my expectations of its success—still, as it is a highly moral Book—(which bye the bye the 'Spy' is not) I believe it will sell—." <sup>10</sup> On 12 July, he continued: "The 'Spy' goes on slowly and will not be finish'd until late in the fall—I take more pains with it—as it is to be an American novel professedly—I think it far better than 'Precaution'—more interest—and better writing—." <sup>11</sup>

Progress reports to Goodrich on *The Spy* cease at this point, probably because Cooper's extreme dissatisfaction with the printing of *Precaution* required the choice of another publisher for the next book. Cooper did refer to *The Spy* in a subsequent letter to Goodrich, however, written between 20 September and 6 October, when he asked a favor, explaining that

a little *girl* who was at Bedford [the home of the Jay family], has been *talking*—she was in and out of the room several times whilst I was reading [*Precaution*, presumably]—and has long ears and a longer tongue—but all her information goes to the "Spy"—she has even got the name—from some other causes I expect to be thought the writer of that work—but will not avow it—cannot some use be made of that to induce people to *unsuspect* me of this. . . . <sup>12</sup>

His aversion to being known as the author of *Precaution* apparently intensified as Cooper's powers of self-criticism developed and his hopes for the success of *The Spy* rose.

Still, the limited commercial success of *Precaution*—as well as the more explosive success of *The Spy*—was essential to Cooper and his family, for he was subsidizing both publications in the midst of severe financial difficulties. At the death of his father, Judge William Cooper, in 1809, James—like his sister and four brothers—had received a generous bequest, munificent by the standards of the time, the equivalent of more than \$50,000. James' share was \$40,000 and twenty-three farms. But these assets became enmeshed in a welter of conflicting claims brought by various creditors. After the War of 1812, the Judge's estate began an inexorable collapse which would have grave effects on Cooper himself.<sup>13</sup> Returning to Cooperstown in 1813, after having spent the two years subsequent to his marriage in Westchester County, Cooper built a home on Lake Otsego; but in 1817 he accepted his father-in-law's offer of a farm back in Westchester, adjoining a second farm previously inherited by Mrs. Cooper, and moved to Scarsdale without having occupied the new home. By this time, Cooper's pecuniary problems were becoming paramount, and when John Peter De Lancey, his father-in-law, conveyed the fifty-seven acres of Angevine on which the Coopers built in 1817-18, the deed was drawn in trust to Mrs. Cooper's brothers, stipulating that they were not to be "encumbered or alienated by the said James Cooper or subjected to any charge whatever on account of his debts."<sup>14</sup> Even as early as the move to Scarsdale, the prospect of a forced sale which would sweep away the remains of Judge Cooper's once ample estate must have seemed likely. By 1820, James' brothers, who served

successively as executors, were dead; and James, as current executor, had apparently already recognized the futility of further effort to rescue the assets of the estate. As he was writing his early experiments and began to be genuinely interested in the possibility of a commercial and critical success with *The Spy*, Cooper was all too clearly floundering, in urgent quest of a congenial, lucrative profession.

Encouraged by local applause and his belated discovery of a pleasurable facility in writing, Cooper was now ready for a more audacious experiment based on a story told some years before in his presence by John Jay, his father's political friend and ally, during a visit to the Governor's son William, a close acquaintance since childhood. The tale was perfectly attuned to Cooper's interest, associations, and imagination. Many years later, in 1854, William Jay wrote to the novelist's daughter Susan Fenimore Cooper and recreated the scene:

I well remember that during one of his visits to Bedford, he and my Father and I were one day sitting together on the Piazza. The conversation turning on revolutionary incidents, my Father observed that it was very remarkable that men without moral principle had nevertheless manifested the most disinterested self denying zeal in the cause of their country. In illustration of his remark he referred to an individual who went into New York during its occupancy by the British and there professed himself an adherent of the loyal cause. Availing himself of the opportunities he there enjoyed, he acquired and transmitted to the Americans much important intelligence. On one occasion he left the city secretly & proceeded to White

Plains where the New York conventions were then in session. My Father, a member of the Convention, met the man at night in a neighboring wood, and received communications from him. Several times, on learning that armed expeditions were to be sent from the city into Westchester, he contrived to apprise the American officers of the intended excursion, & consequently preparations were made to meet & defeat the enemy. But such was the zeal of this man that in order to maintain the confidence of the British he joined their troops on these occasions, & managed to be taken prisoner by his countrymen, in the very act real or pretended of fighting against them. Of course he was very rudely treated, put under arrest & threatened with the death of a traitor. Yet care was taken to give him the opportunity to escape, on which he would again find his way back to N[ew] York, where his invectives against the rebels for their cruelty to him tended to sustain his reputation of a loyal subject, & and afford him new facilities for again acting the part of a spy and traitor. It was this recital that gave your Father the hint of his "Spy."<sup>15</sup>

Jay's memorable story, summarized by Cooper in *The Spy* and alluded to in his 1831 and 1849 Prefaces (see pp. 12-21), furnished the narrative frame for the novel in the contrasting but reciprocal roles of John Jay/George Washington/Mr. Harper and the unidentified spy/Harvey Birch. Jay's story also aligned with Cooper's theme, the classical concept of civic virtue filtered through the Italian Renaissance and British thought of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries

to the generation of the Founders. According to the historian Gordon S. Wood, it meant a "willingness of the individual to sacrifice his private interests for the good of the community," for "public virtue. . . was primarily the consequence of men's individual private virtues."<sup>16</sup> Thus exclusive self-interest could only have "disastrous results for the community."<sup>17</sup> The exalted, almost godlike stature accorded the Founders, especially Washington, in post-Revolutionary iconography, is today perhaps the most persuasive reminder of the existence of this ideal, though it was no doubt more a cultural aspiration than an accomplished reality. Without questioning the idea of patriotism, Washington understood that those who act upon the principles of disinterestedness were a distinct minority, and that this principle alone could never have supported the Revolutionary War. Yet Washington, Jay, Lafayette and others in important posts did serve without monetary reward, and Washington knew that the War could not have been won without them. Jay himself unequivocally subscribed to this classical idea, and Cooper, of the next generation, understood and sympathized with such Spartan attitudes, eventually pointing out how even Washington, on at least one occasion, had succumbed to a personal desire that his last official act not be a disagreement with Congress.<sup>18</sup>

Placed in the foreground of Revolutionary iconography, the characters of *The Spy* array themselves in a wide spectrum, encompassing both American and Tory, as well as all social and economic classes. At one end rests fidelity to the classical patriotic code, illustrated by the natural aristocrat Mr. Harper (George Washington in disguise), "who participates in the action as a *deus ex machina* from an untouchable moral and physical height,"<sup>19</sup> and the outcast peddler Harvey Birch, the



titular hero, whose low and impecunious station does not prevent him from demonstrating a "latent nobility in even the most humble person."<sup>20</sup> At the other end exist expediency and solipcism, embodied in the renegade Cow-Boys and Skinners, who owe loyalty solely to the act of plundering despite their putative guerrilla allegiances to Tory and Colonist causes respectively. The key condition for classical honorable and disinterested conduct seems to be fidelity to a code of behavior that would sacrifice even family and friends to the public objectives of the conflict. In this sense *The Spy* becomes, as it were, a military/political/social vortex in which the whirl of incidents illuminates the various characters' capabilities (and incapacities) of such conduct. In this light, Isabella Singleton's lingering death caused by a stray bullet, for example, maudlin as many initial reviewers of the novel found it to be, is appropriate because she allows her own concerns—her unrequited love for Dunwoodie—to occlude the higher, more solemn goals of the struggle between the colonists and the British. The brutal hanging of the renegade Skinner is likewise schematically necessary; his actions contradict the peddler's "latent nobility" and embody the selfishness and greed that annihilate the public concern furthered, albeit secretly, by Harvey Birch. Dunwoodie himself is allied with Mr. Harper because he puts his military and moral duty to the public weal before both his love for Frances and his respect and friendship with her brother Henry; only after he has proven his faith in the Republic and been removed from action by a wound does Mr. Harper encourage his marriage to her.

If we consider the Revolution to be a kind of civil war—signaled by the conflicting allegiances within the Wharton family and the contested "neutral ground" that was

Westchester County—two other issues become paramount: disguise and the power exerted by family ties. The very title of the tale, along with the allusions to John André scattered throughout the text, present disguise as an ambiguous phenomenon. George Washington's role as Mr. Harper, we clearly infer, proceeds from selfless motives. Harvey Birch's numerous personae, though initially appearing as his efforts to save his own skin, eventually reflect action as selfless as that of his Commander-in-Chief. Neither uses his disguises, as Colonel Wellmere does, to further his own interests or to debase others. The spatial focus at which these themes intersect most completely is of course "The Locusts," the residence of the Whartons and the geographical center of the novel. Henry Wharton opens the novel innocently disguised in order to pay a visit to his family, who are temporarily behind American lines, but this action condemns him to execution as a British spy, a sentence ultimately commuted by a note from General Washington himself through the agency of a disguised Harvey Birch. His sister Sarah's personal fascination with Colonel Wellmere's flattery makes her side with the British, while in contrast his other sister Frances' love for Dunwoodie originates not only in his attractiveness but in the cause he represents. She is constantly balancing her personal interest with her respect for duty, and it is perhaps this latter quality which makes her appealing to Mr. Harper. Finally, Mr. Wharton, the patriarch, trying desperately to maintain a neutral stance, compromises his own integrity because he is consumed with grief at his son's impending death. Dedication to the higher duty of public classical virtue, the novel implies, provides the measuring rod for the conduct of each individual's

life, no matter what its social and economic status might be: a true measure of early American identity.

II.

Appealing as it was, John Jay's anecdote of patriotic martyrdom could hardly have evolved into a novel so suddenly if Cooper had not been fully saturated in the rich and exciting lore of Westchester County during the Revolution. Through his marriage to Susan Augusta DeLancey in 1811, Cooper had gained privileged access to the colorful history of one of the most prominent American Tory Families, one directly descended from Caleb Heathcote, first Lord of the Manor of Scarsdale. Furthermore, as a resident of the county from 1811 to 1813 and 1817 to the 1820s, member of the local militia and the Westchester County Historical Society, and secretary to DeWitt Clinton's New York gubernatorial campaign in 1819-20, he thoroughly familiarized himself with the Westchester past: its terrain, people, manners, language, custom, folklore and military history. Angevine, the Cooper cottage built in 1817, stood near the center of the "neutral ground"—during the Revolution, a simmering cauldron of conflicts between British and American forces. Westchester's fertile fields and picturesque farms were constantly invaded for plunder by brigands of renegade Americans known as "Skinners," opposed by Tory sympathizers called "Cow-Boys," whose leader, James DeLancey, the "Colonel of the Cow-Boys" or the "Outlaw of the Bronx," was the cousin of Susan Augusta Cooper's father.<sup>21</sup> And, once he had begun to write the novel, Cooper apparently cultivated the memories of survivors

of the Revolution, inviting them to Angevine to spin their yarns.

Though the concept for *The Spy* coalesced quickly in Cooper's mind, turning the welter of experience, history, setting and oral tales into a novel took longer than he intended. He told Goodrich on 12 July 1820, in his last mention of composition prior to the novel's publication, that he anticipated completion in the late fall, but the novel did not appear until over a year later. Perhaps he did not feel confident of the success of this new experiment. But he was also distracted by other projects for over six months in 1821; in searching for a new publisher after the catastrophic printing of *Precaution*, he established a close association with Charles Wiley of Wiley and Halsted, New York, who was bringing out a new quarterly, *The Literary and Scientific Repository, and Critical Review*, edited by Cooper's old messmate Charles K. Gardner. Both Gardner and Wiley solicited Cooper for contributions. The January 1821 number of *The Repository*, which noticed *The Spy* as being in press,<sup>22</sup> saw the first of three major anonymous reviews during that winter and spring, reviews which can now be attributed to Cooper: on Thomas Clark's *Naval History of the United States, from the Commencement of the Revolutionary War to the Present Time* (February); an enthusiastic appraisal of *An Examination of the New Tariff Proposed by the Hon. Henry Baldwin; a Representative in Congress*, by "one of the People" (April); and the lead article for July, on Scoresby's *An Account of the Arctic Regions, with a History and Description of the Northern Whale Fishery*.<sup>23</sup> Both the naval history and the whale fishery reviews would certainly have sparked Cooper's involvement, since he had been in the navy and had owned a whaling boat, and the tariff

discussion would have led him into the complex arena of national economics, in which he must have spent time marshalling and understanding the technicalities. He seems to have returned to *The Spy* as his highest priority in July 1821, however; his next contribution, a review of William Parry's *Journal of a Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage*, did not appear until January 1822, when the complete novel was already published. Thus Cooper's recollections in an 1843 autobiographical letter to Rufus Griswold are corroborated: ". . . a copy of the first volume [of *The Spy*], bound, lay about my house, several weeks, before a line of the second volume was thought of."<sup>24</sup>

Even though the first volume had been finished for some months, Cooper's progress on the second had its own problems. In the same letter to Griswold, he confesses that he wrote the last chapter and had it printed and *paged* "before several of the preceding chapters were even concieved [sic]." Apparently, when Wiley & Halsted urged him to complete the novel, they were concerned about the length, and Cooper's efforts had to make the writing of the intervening chapters fit the already determined pagination. This must have led to dissatisfying instances of "*filling up*," precisely one of the impressions reported to Cooper by Gardner on 7 January 1822.<sup>25</sup>

Fortunately, Cooper had opportunities to address the consequences of such variegated writing and printing procedures almost immediately and at several subsequent occasions. The novel took off and became America's first best-seller. The first edition, appearing on 22 December 1821, "has succeeded over and beyond my own expectations and they were not easily to be exceeded," wrote Wiley to Cooper on 7 January 1822;<sup>26</sup> and he set about preparing a second edition

from reset forms of standing type, which was issued on 5 March. Demand was still not satisfied, so Wiley reset yet a third edition, published in May. Cooper had utilized the second edition as a further proofreading of the text, making over 300 revisions, primarily substituting some words and phrases. But the haste with which it was prepared presumably led Cooper to make a more thorough set of revisions for the third edition. And the rankling memory of the inconsistencies and "blunders" of all these editions most likely motivated him to put *The Spy* at the top of his list when he agreed to prepare nine of his works for the Bentley Standard Novels series in 1831. "The book was full of faults," he reported to the British firm on 12 April, sending them "the whole of *Spy*, corrected,"

. . . and I am amazed to see how many had crept in through the carelessness of the printers, though Heaven knows, there were enough of my own. Had you given me more time, I could have made a good book of the *Spy*, but it would require material changes, in the text, and some in the story—As it is, I think it very materially improved.<sup>27</sup>

An examination of the interleaved copy on which Cooper made his changes shows that *The Spy* is by far the most heavily revised of these 1831 revisions, containing not only the usual new Introduction and footnotes addressed to British readers, but complete passages rewritten and even excised. He was finally able to deal with the stylistic problems and uncertainties resulting from his first attempt at a serious work of fiction. Yet he returned to the text once more, in 1849, adding new material to the Introduction and providing some adjustments in the text

for the Putnam Author's Revised Edition, published on 2 May. With that, his work on this novel was complete.

III.

Desperate as he was for a lucrative profession, Cooper was surprised and pleased that his literary interests and talent paid off so suddenly in the winter of 1822. Comparing the succession of "Prefaces" he wrote for the first three Wiley & Halsted editions, one sees Cooper's growing confidence in himself as a writer, but especially, since he was professedly writing about "love of country," vindication of his choice to be an American writer. "We do not absolutely aver," he says in the conclusion to the first "Preface,"—after listing a catalogue of pros and cons in which he tries to subvert negative reaction to the subject matter and its medium—"that the whole of our tale is true; but we honestly believe that a good portion of it is; and we are very certain, that every passion recorded in the volumes before the reader, has and does exist. . . (p. 5). In the much shorter second "Preface," he begins by stating, "The Author of this work will not attempt to describe the satisfaction with which he listened to his publishers, when they informed him, that his interests required a second edition of the tale" (p. 6). He continues with a humorous list of advice and suggestions that various friendly readers have given him, all of which deal with their responses to the American material of the novel. "The Author believes," he concludes, "that most of the good will, with which 'The Spy' has been received is owing to 'love of country.' If he has in any degree contributed to this feeling, his principal object is attained" (p. 7). This belief yields, in the third "Preface," to a more elaborate discussion of

the American character: "Many people think, that as the United States is, in the way of works of fiction, untrodden ground, it is a fine field for the pen of an author. . . . Common sense is the characteristic of the American people: it is the foundation of their institutions; it pervades society, bringing the high and the low near to each other: it tempers our religion, yielding that indulgence to each other's weakness, which should follow the mandates of God; it wears down the asperities of character. . ." (pp. 9-10). And his conclusion dramatizes his realization that he has found a vocation:

Were we to relate the disadvantages under which "The Spy" was written and *printed*, we should only gain credit with some four or five to whom we are intimately known; but after our unexpected introduction to the American public, we must add, that it was printed as it was written; that it was printed with a very superficial revision of the press—the second edition without a proof-sheet coming out of the office; and that it was published without a hope of success. We should have been above stating these facts with a view to disarm criticism; but, after the reception that has been bestowed on our work, we present them by way of apology (p. 11).

So convinced was Cooper by May of 1822 that he could mine this newly discovered ore to great advantage that he was already hard at work writing *The Pioneers*.



IV.

In fact, Cooper had opened up a vast new area for fictional cultivation, as the proliferation of piracies, translations and adaptations demonstrates. It also provided a unique opportunity for illustrations.<sup>28</sup> *The Spy* not only found a special place in the hearts of his countrymen, but abroad as well. As he himself acknowledged in his 1843 autobiographical letter to Griswold, "[*The Spy*] was early translated into most of the languages of Christendom, including those of Russia, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, &c and I got credit, in my own country, for being translated into French and German!"<sup>29</sup>

Translations and piracies were not the only currency for the novel, though. As early as 21 February 1822 the novel was "dramatized by a gentleman of this city," reported the *New York Statesman & Evening Advertiser*; "good judges have pronounced the play a meritorious performance; and the public will next week have an opportunity of seeing Harvey Birch and his associates tread the stage" (p. 2, col. 6). The 1 March issue carried an appeal by "Thespis" for public support for *The Spy*'s dramatic production, using it as a key example that public patronage will "not only produce novels but plays which will prevent the necessity of having such constant recurrence to the works of England" (p. 2, col. 5). And the novel even found its way into the gossip columns and fillers: "*The Spy*," says the same newspaper on 13 March—"We have been informed this morning that this Novel was the cause of Mr. Pinkney's [a senator from Maryland] death. Report says that after being very actively engaged in professional business [arguing a case before the Supreme Court] during the day and evening, he took

up the SPY and read til 5 o'clock in the morning, when he suddenly fell into a fit, which was the commencement of his final disease" (p. 2, col. 6).

Initial reviews of *The Spy* attest to the enthusiasm and patriotism of the *New York Statesman & Evening Advertiser*. They originated, not unexpectedly, in New York, spreading to Philadelphia and Boston, and eventually overseas, especially to England.<sup>30</sup> The *New York Commercial Advertiser*, on 28 December 1821, gave the first accolade: "The present work. . . must, and will, be highly popular, and will secure to the author a reputation in the republic of letters, of which he may justly be proud." The anonymous reviewer went on to strike the notes that many subsequent notices echoed both in America and abroad. The slightly defensive tone concerning the novel's being based on American materials and written by an American—"And we hesitate not to say, notwithstanding its being an American production, and without fearing a strait jacket for our presumptuous assertion, that in point of interest, and in some other particulars, it surpasses several of the novels of the mighty wizard of Scotland"—is here combined with the reference to Sir Walter Scott that would plague Cooper throughout his career. To elaborate the comparison, the reviewer brings up the lack of an American past:

But still we do not think so meanly of our countrymen, as to believe that a tale of substantial merit, will be suffered to lie neglected amongst the rubbish of a bookseller's shop, merely because it is not profusely ornamented with stars and garters, castles, spectres and draw-bridges—We believe this to be the best American novel that has appeared, and we know it has attractions,

numerous and prominent, which entitles [sic] it to more than common attention.

Even the reservations this writer has would resound throughout subsequent reviews: "a few trifling errors in grammar has [*sic*] escaped the author"; "the digressions, though neither long nor tedious, may be thought too numerous"; and "the interesting family groupe are dismissed rather too abruptly, when the army retired to winter quarters." Cooper probably had these and other critiques in mind when he made his 1822 revisions, and presumably they must have affected his complaining tone when he wrote to Colburn and Bentley in 1831 that *Spy* needed a "severe pen."

Throughout January, in fact, the public commotion surrounding the novel made superb newspaper copy. "We have just risen," states *The [New York] American* on 3 January, "with much delight from the perusal of this novel; and while the charm of it is yet strong upon our minds, and our feelings still bear witness to the deep interest of its story, we hasten to apprise our readers of the gratification to be derived from this American work." *The [New York] Statesman*, on 9 January, ran a less than enthusiastic notice which complained of "the partiality of the author, in selecting all his generals, and colonels, and majors and his impassioned beauties, from Virginia and Georgia, while poor 'Harvey Birch,' the peddler, is made the only representative of 'the eastern colonies.'" But the editors had to retreat three days later when they received a response from none other than "Harvey Birch" himself, who mounted a political soapbox:

I cannot but censure your attempt to draw geographical lines of party among the readers of novels. Our republic should be united in literature, if not in politics. The author probably had no particular partiality for Virginia officers, or southern brunettes. Besides, the heroine of his tale is a rosy daughter of the north, who loves a Virginian, as if to do away local prejudices and strengthen the ties of the Union.

Philadelphia leaped into the fray in the representation of *The National Gazette and Literary Register*, on 20 January, with more delicate sentiments that continued the comparison to Scott by asserting that "several of its chapters would not be unworthy of [his] hand." "We might be content," the reviewer began, "with stating that [*The Spy*] engaged our curiosity and feelings, strongly; and that we believe there are few readers—Americans particularly,—with whom it would not have equal success. . . ." Apparently trying to be more sophisticated than the New York reviewers, the anonymous writer listed his problems with the novel first, among them the fastidious and defensive statement, as if casting a glance over his shoulder to discover British reaction, that "the tone of the American Captains and Lieutenants of horse is too nearly that of the roughest troopers. Young gentlemen of refined connexions and liberal training could not so speedily be transformed, in such a service, into the order called barrack-blades, in language and demeanor." He offered the author theoretical advice from "Dr. Moore's" "Preface to an Edition of Smollett's works," requesting that he avoid "extreme improbability, high colouring, very broad farce," which "injure the natural and just effect of such productions." But he grudgingly admitted that