

Historical Introduction

The Bravo, which Cooper was to call in 1844 “*in spirit, the most American book I ever wrote*,”¹ was written in France during one of the most intellectually stimulating periods in the author’s life. He began the novel in mid 1830, two years after publishing *Notions of the Americans* (another “*most American book*”), which he had produced, as he wrote to Charles Wilkes, because Lafayette asked him for a work “to do credit to our country.” Rather than record a “tame and monotonous account” that would describe the old hero’s triumphant tour of the states ending with an elaborate reception in New York City in 1824, Cooper undertook a “sketch of the U. States” that would combine “striking incidents” of Lafayette’s visit with information about the United States that Cooper thought Europeans needed to know.² The resulting book gave an extremely favorable picture of both the country and its distinguished visitor, and should have made Cooper feel he had partly repaid the courtesy Lafayette extended to the Coopers when they first reached France. Arriving in Paris on 24 July 1826, they received the next day an invitation to visit La Grange, as Lafayette began his campaign to enlist the American author as a political ally.

The current intimacy with Lafayette and his family was, however, only the latest in a series of the Coopers’ connections with France. Talleyrand, who had been the family’s guest in Cooperstown in 1795, when James was six, was attending Charles X in Paris when the author and his family arrived. Once settled in quarters at 12 Rue St. Maur, the Coopers were invited to the famous salon of the Duchess de Broglie, the daughter of Madame de Stael. Judge Cooper, the novelist’s father, had managed some 23,000 acres of land in St. Lawrence County, New York, for Madame de Stael after the death of her father in 1804. Furthermore, Lafayette himself had been a huge figure in Cooper’s early years. The novelist was clearly speaking of his own youthful self when he wrote, in *Notions of the Americans*:

I remember the deep, reverential, I might almost say awful attention, with which a school of some sixty children on a remote frontier, listened to the tale of his sufferings in the Castle of Olmutz, as it was recounted to us, by the instructor, who had been a soldier in his youth, and fought the battles of his Country, under the orders of the 'young and gallant Frenchman.' We plotted among ourselves the means of his deliverance, wondered that the Nation was not in arms to redress his wrongs, and were animated by a sort of reflection of his own youthful and generous chivalry.³

Cooper's familial connections with France and his lifelong memories of Lafayette were a firm base for his European experiences that were to go into the making of *Notions of the Americans* and *The Bravo*.

After some two years of residence in France, the Coopers left to spend a year and a half in Italy. In Florence and Rome they hobnobbed with such political exiles as members of the Bonaparte family and the Polish patriot, Adam Mickiewicz. Their Italian residence ended with a sojourn of some ten days in Venice, a period which Cooper was later to remember as "not quite a month."⁴ The city made a strong impression, as Cooper later confessed. "Certainly, no other place ever struck my imagination so forcibly; and never before did I experience so much pleasure, from novel objects, in so short a time."⁵

Cooper returned to Paris on 20 August 1830, just eleven days after Louis Philippe had been installed, with Lafayette's help, as the "Citizen King" following the revolution of 29 July. Charles X had fled to England and Lafayette was in charge of the National Guard. Writing to Peter Jay early in September, Cooper reported:

The review of the National Guards was really imposing. There were probably 40,000 men under arms, with La Fayette at their head. For a few days the old veteran held the fate of France in his single hand. He is very active, and still very important.⁶

Clearly involved in the events of the day, Cooper added: "I was at the soirée of La Fayette last night, when to the amazement of every one old Talleyrand walked into the room." In a letter to Charles Wilkes, he said there seemed to be a "mutual confidence" between Lafayette and the King "who he tells me is more democratical than his ministers."⁷ Subsequent events bore out this impression. On 19 September Cooper went with Lafayette to be presented to the King. "So little ceremony

was used, that La Fayette . . . first proposed the presentation to me at 2 o'clock" the same day. The King was in the uniform of the National Guard and after a short conversation with him, Cooper reported, "He spoke of his visit to America with pleasure, and used very courteous though unaffected language."⁸ Cooper was clearly pleased by the King's plebeian behavior and could write, "The King is very simple in his habits; Scarcely a King, in this respect. I have met him walking in the Thuilleries, and even riding in the *front* seat of a sort of light wagon, with the Queen on the hind seat. No guards—indeed there are no guards at present."⁹

With all the political changes either taking place, as in France, or appearing imminent in much of the rest of Europe, Cooper naturally concentrated on observing and comparing various forms of government. The day after his introduction to the King, he entered in his journal a brief resumé of a conversation he had with an English lord, and ended with this speculation: "One is tempted to ask, why France has not the same right to conceal a republick under the mantle of a King, as England has to conceal an aristocracy beneath the same shallow disguise?"¹⁰ Cooper, in short, seems to have agreed with Lafayette, who wished to make France a "nominal monarchy but virtually a republick."¹¹

Lafayette's confidence in Louis Phillippe's democratic inclinations (or in the King's ability to act independently of the factions surrounding him) proved to be mistaken, however. Lafayette was dismissed and his post as Commander of the National Guard was abolished on 24 December 1830. Cooper later summed up these events in a letter to Charles Wilkes:

That Lafayette has been out manoeuvred by the party which surrounds the King, I take to be beyond a doubt. I see no delusion in his republican institutions with a royal summit, but I have been of opinion from the first that he should have laid his institutions and seated his King on them, and not attempt [ed] to spin a web of republican simplicity with a royal distaff—The tendency of government, now, is certainly to aristocracy.¹²

Cooper's first known mention of *The Bravo* occurs at the end of a long letter he wrote from Dresden to Peter Augustus Jay on 15 July 1830.¹³ Given the events he was observing and his sensitivity to his role as a United States citizen and a spokesman for the newest of the world's

republics, it follows that the subject of the new novel would be a republic. That he chose the Venetian republic of the early 18th century instead of one of the separate Swiss republics that he called “the strongest and best in Europe,” was partly because of the scenic and thematic possibilities the old Venetian republic offered. Conveniently, he had at hand the Count Pierre Antoine Daru’s *Histoire de la Republique de Venise* (1819) which was a link to the archives of Venice, as he explained in the 1834 preface he wrote to the English edition:

The idea of “The Bravo” was obtained from a set of state maxims that prevailed in Venice, and which were exposed by the archives of that ruthless government falling into the hands of the French, at the conquest of the republic during the wars of the great revolution.

Cooper later said that the situation of Jacopo, the falsely accused Bravo, was “taken from the history of Monsieur Daru.”¹⁴

In proposing *The Bravo* to his English publishers on 1 December 1830, Cooper said that the book was “about half written” and went on to discuss what was occupying all their thoughts at the time:

I agree with you perfectly, that there is every appearance of a general war. . . . Viewed solely in reference to permanent and general motives of policy, France and Russia should be allies, as opposed to England and Austria, but family alliances and some personal intrigues are just at this moment, unfavorable to such a partition of the powers—I think it will terminate in another crusade against France, and a wide hurricane of revolutions.¹⁵

The “family alliances” and “personal intrigues” that Cooper believed were making predictions about Europe’s future uncertain were also part and parcel of the novel he was writing.

Cooper was conscious of his privileged position as an observer and congratulated himself, in the 1834 preface, on the chance to write the book in Paris where “opportunity was not wanting to illustrate the subject by observing the manner in which the specious and designing trifled with the just hopes of the mass. . . .” His view of his own privilege is also revealed by some of his comments about Thomas Jefferson, whose letters he was then reading for the first time:

I own he begins to appear to me, to be the greatest man, we ever had. His knowledge of Europe was of immense service to him. Without it, no American is fit to speak of the institutions of his Country, for as nothing human is perfect, it is only by comparison, that we can judge of our own advantages.¹⁶

In a later journal entry, Cooper stated that Jefferson had “profited immensely from his living in Europe,” and went on to regret that Hamilton had never had a chance to live in Europe and “separate the ore from the dross.”¹⁷

Another connection between Cooper’s reading, the novel he was writing, and current events appears in a letter he wrote to Louis McLane who was leaving his post as Minister to Great Britain and returning to the United States to replace Martin Van Buren as Jackson’s Secretary of State. In this letter, Cooper suggested that the “advisers” to “King Andrew” were deficient in their understanding of European politics.¹⁸ He made himself even clearer when he wrote to his friend Captain Shubrick of the U. S. Navy:

When Gen. Jackson came into power, it was with a formidable character for decision and an inclination to make the flag respected. Now, to us in Europe, it seems that he or his friends for him, have done all they can to strip him of this reputation, which was precisely the reputation we wanted.¹⁹

Possibly Cooper saw some resemblance between what would come to be known as President Jackson’s “Kitchen Cabinet” and the mysterious Council of Ten that had directed the affairs of the Venetian republic in the early part of the 18th century. As a historian of Jackson’s presidency says, “They were all professionals in party politics and they understood how men were managed or manipulated, rewarded or punished to implement the operation of government.”²⁰ As Cooper’s letter to Shubrick disclosed, the author feared those around Jackson sought to make him a figurehead subservient to Congress, just as the senators controlled the Doge.

While *The Bravo* incorporated some of Cooper’s current concerns, it is also related to his previous work, particularly to *The Spy* which had been published in the United States and pirated in England nine years earlier. Cooper was revising this novel, which had first brought him to the world’s attention, for re-publication in England, France,

and the United States and for translation elsewhere. Both *The Spy* and *The Bravo* have as their titular character a man who is forced to assume a false or double identity and who must suffer in silence the anguish of being misunderstood—even detested. The solitude that envelopes each man is almost palpable and the atmosphere of each book is darkly foreboding. Cooper is credited by some modern critics with having invented the espionage novel, and while *The Bravo* is not a spy novel as such, it does share some of the same characteristics. However, unlike the detective character, who can be counted on to put to rights a deranged moral order, the secret agent is only a pawn in a game of disproportionate, hidden, and merciless powers. An actor in the unfolding drama of history, the secret agent can hope that justice will prevail, but neither he nor the reader can count on it.

In addition to his own previous work, Cooper had in mind other literary sources. One of his acquaintances at this time was Samuel Rogers, who had entertained him in England in March of 1828. Writing belated thanks for Rogers's "kindnesses" from Paris in 1832, Cooper told him that while composing *The Bravo* he had "frequently stimulated the imagination by reading your own images and tales" of Venice and its surroundings in Rogers's *Italy*. In the same letter, he told Rogers that he had been "accused of presumption for laying the scene of a story in a town rendered immortal by Shakespeare and Byron." Modestly, or at least disarmingly, Cooper pleaded the "right of insignificance" and claimed "the idea of invading the domains of your great poets never crossed my brain. I had a crotchet to be delivered of, and produced it must be, though it were stillborn."²¹ The epigraphs to *The Bravo* suggest otherwise, however, since in addition to eight from Rogers, there are thirteen from Shakespeare and nine from Byron.

One literary precursor he might have used but did not was Monk Lewis's *The Bravo*. Phinney's bookstore in Cooperstown had advertised *Abelino, the Bravo of Venice*, "A Romance translated from the German, by M. G. Lewis" in 1816 and 1817, and the Coopers were in town at the time, but if Cooper ever saw the book he forgot all about it, as his subsequent remarks make clear.²² He referred to his own book as "The Bravo" in his first letter about it to his publishers, Colburn and Bentley, on 1 December 1830, but in a February letter to the same publishers he called it "The Venetian Tale." The working title remained "Bravo," however, through March, and in a letter of 27 April 1831 he told Charles Wilkes that he would call the work "The Bravo I think, but

I am not decided.” The reason for his indecision is explained in a letter he wrote to Shubrick four days later.

I don't know whether you were ever at Venice?²—I think not, however. When I was there this time twelvemonth, the place took such deep hold of my fancy, that I have been obliged to disburthen it in a tale. It is in press, and will appear in July. I have not yet decided on the name, but believe it will be “Bravo.” I find Monk Lewis had a story called “The Bravo of Venice,” which may induce me to choose another title.²³

Susan Cooper added more information about the book's composition in *Pages and Pictures*.

The author was repeatedly accused by his countrymen of having closely copied the novel of Lewis, bearing the title of “The Bravo of Venice,” and also of imitating a drama taken from that romance, and called “Abellino.” These criticisms and accusations may be scarcely remembered to-day, but it will be well, perhaps, simply to assert the fact that before writing this tale of Venice, Mr. Cooper had never read a line of either work—the romance of Lewis, or the drama referred to. “The Bravo” was as entirely original with him, in its general conception and in its details, as “The Prairie,” or “The Pioneers.”²⁴

Susan reported that Cooper had purchased, while in Venice, several works giving the political history of the Venetian government, but she mentioned no titles. She also revealed that the name of Gelsomina, which Cooper gave to the character he said was his heroine, was that of a peasant girl who lived with the family as “half nurse and half play-fellow to the children” when they were in southern Italy.

Because of the lack of international copyright laws and the difficulty of sending manuscripts and proofs between continents, Cooper's books often had a complicated publishing history, but *The Bravo* was unusually challenging. Living in Paris and sending copies of his manuscript to Colburn and Bentley in London, Cooper also had to correct proofs from London and send duplicate copies in separate ships to Carey and Lea, his American publishers, in time for them to publish and forestall any piracies based on the London edition. After proposing “a work called Bravo” to Colburn and Bentley on 30 December 1830, Cooper asked them in March when they would like the whole work.

They answered that 15 June would suit the British market, but Cooper objected that Carey and Lea would need a month of delay and asked if they could print it by the middle of May. He also proposed that they return proof sheets to him.

In this way we might get on faster than with the French composers, you would have the only English edition in Europe, and I should not have the vexation of dealing with a French publisher, a thing I detest? I do not know what the expense of sending sheets is in England, but in France it is very light, provided they are left open at one end, like a newspaper—I will pay the French postage gladly if you will pay the English, and by being prompt and punctual we may finish the affair I should think by the 15 or 20 May—or at least in time to publish by the 1st July.²⁶

In the same letter, he agreed to correct six of his early novels for £50 each and told Colburn and Bentley how to prepare interleaved copies of the latest Carey and Lea editions to facilitate his emending the texts. These revisions and writing new prefaces for these books would further complicate the publication schedule of *The Bravo*.

As it turned out, Cooper and his publishers in England relied mostly on a series of couriers rather than the post to transmit manuscripts and proofs. Colburn and Bentley instructed Cooper to send manuscript in small packets of not over two ounces each through the bag of the British Ambassador at Paris, and Cooper returned the revised interleaved volume of *The Spy* through the British Embassy to the American Legation in London. Other manuscripts and proofs and revised novels went to London by such travelers as an Episcopal rector traveling for his health or “a Mr. Lang of New York” who was going from Paris to London. Cooper did tell his publishers that it was not necessary to send back the manuscript “as I scarcely ever refer to it, and it greatly increases the packages.”²⁷

Cooper sent the first ten chapters on 16 April 1831. Nine days later he wrote his publishers that “taking a new lodging” and revising three of his early novels for them had meant that he had “not touched Bravo for six weeks.” He had a volume to write and “nearly two to copy”—which meant that part of the second volume (of the customary three in Britain) was being or had been copied. On 13 May, Cooper reported that he was “getting on with vol 3d” and on 2 June he complained of the delay in receiving proofs, saying they were not halfway through

the first volume in correcting proofs. When one set of the sheets of Volume 1 reached him on 13 June, he wrote to say again that he needed five copies, not just one. He had given this one to Defaucompret, his French translator, and

I have immediate need of another for the German, and duplicates for America and one copy in case of accidents in my own keeping. I give my secretary [his nephew, William Cooper] the benefits of the German and French translations. . . . Carey & Lea . . . are my most important publishers in the way of remuneration.

In this same letter, he said that he was sending the manuscript for half of Vol. 3 and corrected proofs of Vol. 1 “by a Friend who leaves here on Saturday.” He sent the manuscript for all “but the two last chapters” on 2 July, and Colburn and Bentley acknowledged receipt in a letter of 11 July. On 27 July, Cooper returned the corrected sheets of Volume 2 and promised “the rest of Bravo” the next week. “It is done, but not all copied” he added. He sent the last two chapters on 8 August, and requested duplicate proofs so he could correct one for America and “gain a fortnight [*sic*].” In a second letter the same day, he recounted his shipments of manuscript by Ambassador’s bag and diligence and said he was sending “the remainder of the manuscript of Bravo by the Ambassador’s bag.” After saying on 14 August, that they had all had the measles and that he had not been well, he returned “the last proofs of Bravo *except the Preface*” which he had sent to America “in order to complete the work.” He asked for a new proof of the Preface, which “has many blunders” and said he hoped for all printed sheets by 8 September in order to send duplicates to the United States by the Havre packet of 10 September. About this time, Defaucompret went to London to translate the sheets into French as they were printed and was complaining about being delayed by Colburn and Bentley. Gosselin, Defaucompret’s Parisian employer, was afraid that Baudry would have time to pirate an edition in English before the French translation could appear. Cooper was solicitous about protecting the interests of his American and French publishers since, as he had told Colburn and Bentley on 13 May, the American edition and the translations were worth “more than double the value to me than the arrangement with you.”²⁸

Cooper had reason to be satisfied with his financial arrangements in 1831. In spite of a slow season in Britain, Colburn and Bentley had

accepted his offer to produce two novels for £1300, the first being *The Bravo* and the second a work with “scenes on the Great Lakes, with Indians intermingled.” It would be nine years before they got the second, *The Pathfinder*, but they did pay £200, £200, and £250 for the three volumes of *The Bravo*. They also paid £50 a volume for new prefaces and revised texts of eight novels he had previously produced. Writing to Charles Wilkes, his friend who was handling some of his financial arrangements, Cooper said that if his health continued to be good, he would have about \$6,000 in income from Europe alone and that his total receipts would be some \$20,000 for the twelve months from 1 April 1831 to the following April. He also told Wilkes that he had sold two new books to Carey and Lea for \$9,000; these would be *The Bravo*, which they published in 1831, and *The Heidenmauer*, which they published in 1832.²⁹

After completing *The Bravo*, Cooper, Mrs. Cooper, Fanny, and Paul took a brief tour of Belgium and the Rhine early in September, sending William to Le Havre with a servant and hoping that the sea air would restore his health. They returned to Paris on 27 September and William died there suddenly on 1 October. Although he had been ill for several months, he died unexpectedly from the “breaking of an abscess.” Cooper later told Elizabeth de Lancey that “The two Susans were obliged to copy most of the Bravo, for me.”³⁰

Colburn and Bentley printed *The Bravo* on 15 October, without waiting for Cooper’s corrected preface, and Cooper had all three volumes in hand by 18 October. Carey and Lea acknowledged receipt of the remainder of the text in a letter of 21 October 1831, and had it in print by 29 November. Writing to them at the end of December, Cooper said, “I hope you will be wrong in anticipating a bad reception for Bravo.” He continued with a defense of the book and a criticism of their marketing:

You may damn Bravo in America, if you please; I shall not bother myself much about it, but you will go a good while before you get a better book on any American subject, let me tell you. . . .

Are you not very wrong in publishing chapters of my works in advance. I saw two of Bravo, the other day, in the Commercial, which looked woundily like a second edition. They are never accurately printed, and they often anticipate the tale. Stone had something to say about the catastrophe being melancholy, and surely that could do no good. Many people will not read a tale that they know is to end in any

thing but wedlock and a quantum of happiness—Think better of this usage of yours.

In the same letter, Cooper said that he could not “tell you much of its reception in Europe, though Gosselin says it is very decidedly successful in France—more so, by his account, than any of its predecessors.”³¹

In a 19 January 1832 letter to Colburn and Bentley, Cooper asked about *Bravo* and said “They tell me it has done very well here, and I hope you may do something with it.” They answered that the book “has not done so well yet, as some of your former works, not because it is not greatly admired and greatly praised, but that it partakes of a depression which has been felt by the works of all authors without exception.”³² The economic situation in the United States was like that in Britain, according to a letter Charles Wilkes wrote to Cooper on 9 December 1831, saying “We have been lately so very much engaged with business at the Bank and the distress for money makes so many appeals from individuals, that I have been hurried to death—and have not yet had time to read *The Bravo*—but it seems to be very universally well spoken of by all I have heard mention it and is likely to be a favorite.”³³

In his reply to Colburn and Bentley, Cooper said that he had corrected their preface, which was “downright nonsense” for Baudry’s English-language edition published in Paris “out of regard to myself, and you would do well to imitate our example. I cannot say I anticipated very great success for *Bravo* in England, though it is out of measure the best book I have written.”³⁴ Mrs. Cooper agreed, having told her sister, Martha de Lancey, “I think you will like this book very much—it pleases me more than any he has written.”³⁵

The Bravo was immediately translated into French and Italian. Praised by *Figaro*, which Cooper called the “wittiest journal in France,” the novel also got a favorable review from the *Journal des Debats*, which generally opposed Cooper. Published on 14 November 1831, the review praised Cooper’s characters who “triumph over the roués and mighty of the civilized world, whom they defeat by their good sense, shame by their integrity, and frighten by their boldness.” The reviewer added: “far from showing any decay in the fine talents of Mr. Cooper, *The Bravo* suggests a promising new direction Cooper’s genius can pursue.”³⁶

Paolo Olmy’s translation into Italian, first printed in Florence in 1832, was reprinted in Naples in 1836, 1840, and 1847. A different

translation published in Milan in 1832 was followed by thirty Milanese reprintings. In the introduction to his translation, Paolo Olmy said:

In this history, in the guise of a romance, the deservedly famous author has with sound shrewdness portrayed the kind of men who are reproduced in every age and country with grave damage to humanity. . . . He particularly stresses the genuine piety and lofty spirit of the characters belonging to the poorest classes.³⁷

The novel, and Anicet Bourgeois's play adapted from it, *La Venitienne*, led to Saverio Mercadante's opera which was performed at the Teatro alla Scala during the Carnival season beginning 9 March 1839. The opera, first published by Ricordi in Milan, was also published in Florence, Naples, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and London.³⁸ A second opera, this one by Marco Aurelio Marliani, opened at the Theatre-Italien in Paris in 1834 and within a year had reached Italy, England, Austria, and Bohemia. James Robinson Planche made an English version entitled "The Red Mask" for Drury Lane, and yet another adaptation, by Gaston Salvayre, appeared in 1877 at the Theatre-Lyrique in Paris.³⁹

Italian critics accused both Cooper's novel and Daru's history of making various historical errors. Pietro Zorzi, writing in the *Indicatore Lombardo* in January, 1835, said that assassins were not used by the Venetian republic to eliminate its enemies, that Venetian heiresses were not made wards of the state, and that the state Inquisition had not been as terrible as it was pictured. Similar criticisms were made by Barbieri in *Raccoglitore italiano e straneiro* that year.⁴⁰

The longest Italian response known (fifty-four printed pages) came in 1844 when G.B.M. Alvisè Semenzi read to the Ateneo de Treviso his *Osservazioni critiche intorno ad alcune taccie di cui venne accagionato il veneto governo e in particolare intorno al romanzo intitolato IL BRAVO—storia veneziana*.⁴¹ Semenzi said that he had first seen a play (which could have been a melodrama by G. Rossi) and then read Cooper's book. He resented the profanation of the memory of the Venetian government. While he hesitated to publicize unworthy works, the name of James Fenimore Cooper was renowned, and any romance by him could not be ignored. Semenzi inadvertently complimented the novel by stressing the appeal of its touching pictures, lively imagery, suspense, fantastic novelties, and seductive characters. Attacking both Cooper and Daru for misrepresenting Venetian history, Semenzi cited laws dating back to 1567 that decreed severe punishments for

bravos and those who sheltered or hired them, and said that it was ridiculous to believe that a Council that assigned such punishments would employ a bravo. He gave examples of people who had been falsely accused, as the Bravo's father had, but who were later acquitted and publicly proclaimed to be innocent. Proceeding in a manner that modern Italians might call "pedantedesco," (Germanically pedantic), he objected to the description of the city, the characterization of Venetians, and Cooper's failure to portray Venice's arts, customs, and a national opulence that was due to a flourishing commerce rather than rapine.

In England, the book was published by Colburn and Bentley on 15 October 1831 and was ranked by the London *National Omnibus* the same week as "among the best" of Cooper's works, "if not . . . the very best." The *Literary Gazette* compared Cooper's Venice and Byron's, saying that Cooper presented "the other side" of a scene "Byron gloried in." Yet "the interest is most dramatically excited and sustained, and the scenes invested with that vivid reality which constitutes the great charm of Mr. Cooper's narratives." They objected to his "political digressions whose whole and sole object is to prove that everything went wrong in the world till America set an example of right." Professing amazement that Cooper was still lingering "on this side the Atlantic," they nevertheless assured readers that "among the many productions of Mr. Cooper's prolific pen, few are more vivid in interest or more original than *The Bravo*." The *Literary Guardian* of 22 October praised the book but quarreled with some of Cooper's mannerisms. The *Edinburgh Literary Journal*, in a slight and slighting notice, said that Cooper "like his own Tom Coffin . . . cannot keep his feet upon land."⁴²

Admittedly smarting from Cooper's criticism of England in *Notions of the Americans*, the *Atheneum* reviewer complained that Cooper could write as he pleased for Americans, but "it is a little too much to bring his prejudices and his caprices to the market of London." Yet Cooper deserved praise for his "fine conception of character—a true eye for the picturesque—and an art in employing his many coloured materials at once striking and original. His heart is alive to all emotions, whether of heroism or pathos—of tenderness or of sorrow." "Without a rival in the American wilderness," Cooper is "but a second-rate genius" in Europe. The reviewer complained that in a work of fiction "it is not the complex machinery of state which we wish to see at work but human feelings

and human passions.” Cooper seems more interested in the moral than in the story, which the reviewer thought was a mistake.⁴³

Reviewing *The Bravo* in *The Tatler* the same month, Leigh Hunt began by affirming the “superior genius” of Sir Walter Scott, but insisted that Cooper had the advantage in that his “stories have more interest, his women more attraction, and his heroes more volition.” He declared that *The Bravo* contained criticism of Venice that could be applied to England. Praising Cooper for exciting interest early in the work and sustaining it to the end, he said “We are reconciled to the fate of the hero, because it is necessary to the consistency of that selfish policy which it is the author’s aim to expose.”⁴⁴

Making a virtue of the fact that Cooper had invaded Europe and laid claim to part of it, Colburn’s *New Monthly Magazine* reviewed the book in terms that were unusually enthusiastic even for one of their own publications. Because Venice was new to Cooper he could write about it in such a way that it is “as if we had never heard a word about Venice before.” While some of the historical and political threads of the book may be thought dull, they are necessary “to the effect to be produced” and in addition to the interesting fiction there is “more mental power” and more thought-provoking material than in “all the Scotch novels that have so deservedly won our admiration.” The *Monthly Magazine* said Cooper “writes like a man—that is, with a direct and intelligible object.” Using the past to teach the world to “eschew crimes by showing their odious consequences,” he is “anxious that none of the detestation” which attaches to the history of Venice shall be thrown upon his own America “because she too is a republic.” His “only want is a little gaiety—something to cheer the sombre, and lighten the general *weight* of his execution.”⁴⁵

In *The Westminster Review*’s long article that included three brief excerpts, the critic admitted that he was “startled and displeased” when Cooper “made forcible seizure upon Venice, the very centre of all that is most sacred and refined in the romance of the Old World, Shakespeare’s and Byron’s Venice,” but he acquitted Cooper of wanting to “indulge his taste for novelty” and pronounced *The Bravo* a success. Avoiding the trap of describing ancient fashions, which would have demanded the “knowledge of an antiquarian,” Cooper based his narrative on “passions, not manners” and upon “the eternal feelings of the human heart.” Around the “common-place nucleus” of two young lovers, Cooper assembled personages who are “novel, individual, and true.” These show how the ancient Venetian government affected

people. "In the solitude of his outcast state, he [the Bravo] stands forth like a hero of antiquity, struck by the Gods." The scene in which Antonio dies is "one of the most masterly productions of any modern work." The two plots both assist in mutual development and the *Review* reprinted the marriage scene as an example of Cooper's "improvement in the power of portraying the graceful and refined." The critic presciently anticipated the American reception of the book when he noticed that Cooper evidently felt that his countrymen "will be startled and displeased that he, their national author, should desert his native continent, and turn his back on the America which fostered his early talents." He presents his book therefore "as a picture of social misfortunes and political crimes which could never have birth under a free government."⁴⁶

A long essay on "American Works of Fiction" in *Foreign and Colonial Review* relied on published excerpts from journals of Cooper and Miss Sedgwick to claim that "jealousy of the Mother country" afflicted Americans. The critic found that *The Bravo's* "leading invention—an innocent man compelled by craft to assume the abhorred reputation of a state assassin, under penalty of a parent's life—has always seemed to us worthy of a far better treatment than Mr. Cooper's. On such an idea Schiller might have based one of his tragedies."⁴⁷

Such a possibility did not occur to the known German reviewers of the novel. In the *Blatter* of 7 and 8 January 1833, the critic said that Cooper's ignorance of local minutiae in the Venetian scenes contributed indirectly to the excellence of the story; he could not lose himself so much in details, and thus could give more of the flavor of Venice in describing what really counts and gain room for creative imagination. While the reviewer praised the "healthy and full-blooded power" of Cooper's stories and commended the descriptions of the Bravo, the development of the hero's character did not pass muster. This same reviewer described the United States as "the shopkeeper's republic" and the American Revolution as a "mercantile insurrection."⁴⁸

Contrasting with the German reception was the Russian reaction of V. G. Belinsky, writing in the *Moscow Observer* in 1839. He described fighting his way into the book because of a "translation so utterly illiterate as to be unimaginable," but finally

we were not so much reading as devouring with insatiable greed the remaining chapters and parts. And now that the novel has long since been read, these marvelous figures still drift before our eyes, such

figures as can only be created by the fantasy of a great writer: here is the old fisherman Antonio, with his noble coarseness and vigorous simplicity of his ways; here is the profound, mighty, melancholic Bravo; here the tender, pure, sweet Gelsomina; here the flighty, cunning, Annina—what figures, what characters! The perfidious, murky cloak-and-dagger politics of the Venetian aristocracy; the customs of Venice itself; the regatta, or contest of gondoliers; the murder of Antonio—all seems so simple, so commonplace, so trivial; one man wants to go on a spree, another to make a bit of money, another to chase after women, and another to play the dandy. Every face is merry, the public fetes are gay with masks, gondolas ply along the canals. Yet from all this there emerges a kind of colossal spectre, which paralyzes one with horror. And the whole action takes up some three days. There are no external levers; the entire drama springs from the clash of various personalities and the conflict of interests. . . .

Belinsky concluded with recommending that people either read the novel in English or in the French translation, since the French “have the laudable habit of taking trouble over the sense and accuracy of language.”⁴⁹

Robert Walsh, editor of the Philadelphia *National Gazette*, was reading *The Bravo* as Carey and Lea were printing it, and early in November a review in his paper described the work as displaying “genius and power” and said that the localities were “described with a graphic freshness which will be perceived and enjoyed even by the travellers who have surveyed them.” Yet the reviewer complained of “the impression of melancholy which is left by the fate of his principal personages.” Atkinson’s *Saturday Evening Post* reprinted the review, which included the regatta scene, on 5 November 1831.⁵⁰

Carey and Lea published the American edition on 29 November and told Cooper that it was “much liked,” but they later reported “the unfortunate close of our navigation immediately after it was published has prevented it from reaching one half of the interior towns and has affected its sale, wh[ic]h nevertheless has been good.” On 3 December, the *New York American* published a short but favorable review, saying that Cooper’s chief aim, “independently of a tragic story, seems to be to contrast the mysterious and ‘blood-boltered’ aristocracy of the republic of Venice—for republic it was called—with our plain dealing, safe and stainless democracy.” They praised the heroine, the gaoler’s daughter, whose character “is beautifully conceived and sustained” so

that she is worthy of comparison with Jeanie Deans. The Bravo himself and the old fisherman, Antonio, are also “strongly drawn” and the description of Venice and its celebrations are well done. They excused the brevity of this mention by saying that they were “descanting upon what all have read or will read. . . .” The *Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art* had published a notice of *The Bravo* as “imminent” in November, and then in January 1832 reprinted much of the review from the London *Athenaeum* of 22 October, adding “Report speaks of this new production in terms of high eulogy. In point of powerful interest and dramatic effect, it is likely to eclipse any previous work even of this deservedly popular writer.”⁵¹

Sarah Josepha Hale’s *Ladies’ Magazine* reviewed the book intelligently, writing:

The scope of this work is to delineate the most remarkable features in the policy of the Venetian government, and by showing its effects on the character and conditions of that people, contrast their Republic with our own.

The attempt is a novel one, and Mr. Cooper has succeeded admirably. He has sketched with consummate skill the fearful picture of an oligarchy, and shown the terrible influence of an irresponsible government, making those who administer it as wicked as those who suffer it are wretched. He has introduced...to show this picture of ruthless despotism more distinctly, glimpses of light from our blessed Freedom. . . .

After a considerable discussion of Cooper’s service to America and his contribution to European understanding of American institutions, the review went on to praise Cooper for succeeding in the “new field of political novel writing,” and in having the “genius that can portray an individual in the lowest walk of life, one who is ignorant, poor, and old, and yet make the fate of that individual, in consequence of affectionate feeling and moral excellence only, of intense interest to the reader. . . .” Such a writer, they concluded, “must possess powers of mind of a high, as well as pure order.” They would not give an abstract since “every American who feels any interest in his country’s literature should read the whole.” The review ended by quoting a good portion of the favorable review in the *New Monthly* which they attributed to Mr. Bulwer.⁵²

The *Ariel* of Philadelphia wrote that the scenes are “all described in that dashing style and language for which Cooper is characterized,” and the scenes on the water are “deservedly praised.” The *Bravo* himself “is a singular compound of fatuity and art—of recklessness and sagacity—of generosity and folly—of bravery and weakness.” The great aim of the author is to picture “the Venetian oligarchy—their selfishness—their cruelty—their art—their cold blooded inhumanity, and their refined species of Machiavelism.” The termination of the plot is not satisfactory, for Cooper violated the law of poetical justice. However, he succeeded in showing the “destruction of human rights and human happiness, by vicious systems of government” and how “bad laws and aristocratic authority... lead to private crime, public robbery, and violent ends.” The reviewer predicted that Cooper would catch “the popular feeling at present existing in England” and that the book would be popular there while in the United States it “only requires to be known to be read with the utmost avidity.”⁵³

The *American Monthly Review* of February also said that the purpose of the book was to contrast republican institutions and show “how ill-founded” were Venice’s pretensions to being a true republic. Cooper succeeded in doing this, but will not please readers who take up a book “for amusement and excitement merely and not for instruction.” The title is a bad one since many readers will miss the “pleasurable excitement” of approaching a dark corner or shaded portico and “fancying the swift and silent approach of a muffled figure and the gleam of a dagger.” The reviewer admired the “well conceived and delineated” portrayals of Antonio and Jacopo, the former being one of the author’s best creations although “we should not have expected to find such a character in his situation.” The reviewer pointed out the “fine contrast” of the senators Soranzo and Gradenigo who exhibit early and advanced stages of corruption caused by arbitrary power. Gelsomina is so beautifully drawn that she proves Cooper’s ability to delineate females. The reviewer objected to the scene in which the Council of Three relax into recollections of their youthful exploits, and he also complained that Cooper repeats phrases and gives sententious sayings of the Italians that make them sound like Indians.⁵⁴

Boston’s *New England Magazine* began its review by stating that the work was “entitled to notice as the production of an American pen, although the author pursues his profession on another continent...” As a “picture of the crooked policy of Venice, *The Bravo* is worthy of attention,” but as a “romance, a drama, a mere work of fiction, depending

upon the imagination and ability of the author, it is an able—failure.” Continuing to damn by dashes, the reviewer wrote that the Bravo has “no natural connection with the story” and “makes a blood-thrilling and horrible confession of—nothing at all.” The tale’s “one merit” is that neither Leather-Stocking nor Tom Coffin is in it, yet “as these two are decidedly the best characters the author has ever drawn, the merit is somewhat doubtful.” After saying that “There is no story,” the reviewer complained that readers never learn the fate of the lovers, Don Camillo and Violetta. Yet the story of Antonio is “perfect of itself and exceedingly well told.” The “poverty of the author, in a particular where he has been said to be unrivalled—that of description” is shown by his having given us a “book of eyes,” references to eyes being varied only by mention of Antonio’s naked breast. They would say more about the author, particularly “the reputation which he has and the ability which he has not,” but they do not want to hurt sales, literary labor being “poorly paid at best.”⁵⁵

The reviewer for *The Southern Review* incorporated his own considerable familiarity with Venice and its history (remarking, for instance, that Venice and Charleston were both founded by refugees). Saying that Venice “so long and so falsely vaunted” the name of a Republic, the reviewer pointed to Cooper’s emphasis on Venice’s “most characteristic feature—a regulation by public authority of all the citizen’s private affairs.” Acknowledging Monk Lewis’s earlier translation of a German story, the reviewer said that the real innocence of a bravo was the only point of resemblance between Lewis’s work and Cooper’s. Considering Don Camillo and Violetta the hero and heroine, he recounted their story, praised Cooper’s description of the Piazza San Marco, stated that the incident of Antonio’s returning the ring came from a picture by Bordone in the Accademia, and wished that Palma, Giorgione, or Tintoretto could have painted the scene of Antonio’s murder. Like other reviewers, he used the women of this work to declare that Cooper had a “clear insight into woman’s peculiarities” and gave examples of accurate portrayal of female psychology. He praised Cooper’s decision to set the interview between the suicidal Bravo and Don Camillo in the graveyard of heretics, but he thought that the story should have concluded with the successful escape of Don Camillo and Violetta. Yet he agreed with Cooper that “our entirely new-fashioned and experimental Republic” has little to do with those of the Old World, partly because the latter lacked independent newspapers and true representatives. The review ended with the writer’s expression of

sympathy for those “born under political combinations unfavourable to the acquisition of independence and the reward of ambition.”⁵⁶

A month later, in March of 1832, the *Christian Examiner* professed to be “among those who admit Cooper to be a very powerful writer in the department of modern commonsense fiction,” but they said he was no genius, which they proceeded to define in an eighty-four-word transcendentalist dithyramb. After warning their readers that Cooper fails “in all the finer discriminations of life, manners, character, sensibility, and especially of female sensibility,” the review warns that “reading for amusement is almost as bad as card playing” and went on for ten more pages to talk of a Christian’s duties.⁵⁷

Cooper, still in Europe, was aware that he had enemies in New York City, and had written to Samuel F. B. Morse from Switzerland, referring to the foreign correspondent for the *New York Mirror*:

Recollect Mr. Willis’ opinion of the *Bravo*, *after he had read it*, and you will see what lengths they are prepared to go. Now this was the feeling of a man who had never seen me, but who became the dupe of as envious and as malignant a set of pretenders as ever disgraced humanity.

Nathaniel P. Willis changed his mind about *The Bravo* and praised the book in the *Mirror*, but the editors disagreed, writing that any man of Cooper’s “descriptive power might faithfully and strikingly portray the prominent features of such a city, and the result of his pastime would embellish any periodical in the land. . . .” They protested, however, that a novel “requires vastly more *materiel* than such commodities.”⁵⁸

The *New York American* published a review, with a lukewarm disclaimer by the editor Charles King, on 7 June 1832. The reviewer, who signed himself “Cassio,” based his attack on the Baudry Parisian edition of *The Bravo*, and when Samuel F. B. Morse called Cooper’s attention to it later that month, Cooper thought it was a translation of criticism in one of the government-controlled French journals that opposed Cooper because of his support of Lafayette in the financial controversies current in the British and French press.⁵⁹

“Cassio” turned out to be Edward Sherman Gould who had been one of the Americans present at Cooper’s on 28 October 1831 when they formed a twenty-member American Polish Committee to solicit and transfer funds to the Poles. On learning the identity of Cassio, Cooper wrote: