

# *The Cooper Edition*

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BENJAMIN DEMOTT's amusing article, 'The Battle of the Books,' on the Modern Language Association's Center for Editions of American Authors in *The New York Times Book Review*, October 17, 1971, states that editions of twelve nineteenth-century American writers—'Cooper, Crane, Dewey, Emerson, Hawthorne, Howells, Irving, Melville, Simms, Thoreau, Twain, and Whitman—are presently in full progress.' Though Cooper places first alphabetically, it is rather an exaggeration to report the Cooper Edition 'in full progress,' though much of the preparatory work is done and six volumes are in various stages of the editorial process, one nearing completion. Since, with the possible exception of Howells, Cooper was the most prolific of these American writers, a full edition would contain about forty-eight volumes, exclusive of my already published six-volume edition of Cooper's *Letters and Journals* (Harvard University Press, 1960-1968).

When we began, with the approval of the Fenimore Cooper family, we had no even reasonably complete list of early editions of Cooper in English and little knowledge of his literary manuscripts or their whereabouts, though Cooper was easily the most widely known and read of American authors before 1860. Within the last five years, Mr. McCorison and his staff—with the generous assistance of members and friends of the Society—have assembled what is surely one of the greatest collections of early editions of Cooper in existence, a collection still incomplete and growing, and one that will be invaluable for all future bibliographical or textual work on Cooper.

At Clark University, with the assistance of a grant from the American Philosophical Society, we have assembled facsimiles of the greater number of Cooper's extant literary manuscripts; and we are also accumulating at Clark as many duplicates as possible of certain key editions needed for multiple collations.

The Cooper Edition is at present an Associated Edition in the program of the Center for Editions of American Authors, not an edition whose editorial expenses are funded in part through the Center by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The fact that the Cooper Edition, like the Melville and the Twain Works, is an Associated Edition is no reflection on its importance: the Cooper is the largest of all the editions projected and it was not ready for presentation when the other editions were funded. Subsequently, the Council of the National Endowment for the Humanities ruled that no additional editions would be funded until one of the original funded editions is completed—a date now estimated to be 1974.

While we hope that circumstances will eventually permit the Cooper Edition to join the other funded editions, and while we are persuaded that its importance fully justifies funding, we have had no alternative to proceeding as rapidly as we can with the miniscule funding available. Pursuing modest, limited objectives, we have projected initially two series of five volumes each announced by the State University of New York Press in the Spring of 1971: the 'Gleanings in Europe' travel books (*France, England, Switzerland, Italy, and the Rhine*) and the 'Leatherstocking Tales' (*The Deerslayer, The Last of the Mohicans, The Pathfinder, The Pioneers, and The Prairie*). The Editorial Board consists of James Franklin Beard, Jr., Chairman, Clark University; Kay Seymour House, San Francisco State College; Thomas L. Philbrick, University of Pittsburgh; Donald A. Ringe, University of Kentucky; and Warren S. Walker, Texas Technological University. The Advisory Committee is chaired by Robert E. Spiller.

Fortunately, since the average estimated editorial cost per

volume is \$15,000, there are scholars sufficiently interested in Cooper and persuaded of his importance to undertake volumes without promise of compensation. Work on *England*, edited by Kenneth W. Staggs of Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas, is far advanced; and, in fact, editorial work is progressing on all the travel books except *Italy*. We hope to find an editor for it soon. An edition of *The Deerslayer*, undertaken by James A. Kilby, Jr., at the textual center of the University of Iowa is far advanced; and an edition of *The Pioneers* has recently been undertaken by Kenneth Andersen and Lance Schachterle of the English Department of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Much of the detailed editorial supervision will presumably be provided by James P. Elliott, who recently joined the Clark English Department after several years of experience on the well-organized Howells edition at Indiana University.

Our best hope for a relatively rapid completion of the entire edition seems to me the kind of mechanization of the entire collation process proposed by George A. Petty, Jr., and William Gibson in *Project Occult: The Ordered Computer Collation of Unprepared Literary Text* (New York University Press, 1970). In this book, Professors Petty and Gibson describe their successful experimentation with collation from electronic tape. This experimentation has continued, and Professor Petty now informs us of the existence in actual operation in Washington, D.C., of a scanning device that converts printed texts in any font, recognizing upper and lower case characters, into machine readable tape. The perfection of these devices, including techniques for incorporating final editorial corrections on a master tape for typesetting, should eventually free the editor almost entirely for his proper editorial task, enabling him to make his necessary editorial choices with pleasure and dispatch. One of the Cooper volumes, *Switzerland*, is being used in the latest experiments of Professors Petty and Gibson, and there is at least a good possibility that editorial work on this book will see us out of the horse and buggy days of literary editing.

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