JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S *THE HEADSMAN; OR, THE ABBAYE DES* VIGNERONS AND THE LEGEND OF ARNOLD VON WINKELRIED:

JOHN MAYNARD'S EUROPEAN ROOTS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

James Fenimore Cooper, together with his wife and five children, spent seven years in Europe from 1826 to 1833. During that time, Cooper recorded his own movements in his journals while later setting down his impressions of European landscapes, people, towns, customs, national character, and forms of government in five "*epistolary travel narratives*" **[1],** two of which dealt with his two visits to Switzerland in 1828 and, four years later, in 1832. Completion and publication of the five volumes **[2]** did not occur until several years after Cooper's return to the United States. While residing in Paris, the third Leather-stocking novel, ***The Prairie*** (1827), and the maritime novel, ***The Red Rover*** (1828), were completed. ***Notions of Americans***: ***Picked Up by a Travelling Bachelor*** (1828), his first venture into non-fiction, was not a success. Returning to fiction, he wrote ***The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*** (1829) and ***The Water-Witch*** (1830). As if this intensive literary activity might not already be viewed as spectacular and prolific, Cooper also gave his political views and observations literary form in a trilogy of European novels: ***The Bravo*** (1831), set in Venice; ***The Heidenmauer*** [=pagan wall] (1832), set in Germany; and ***The Headsman*** (1833), in Switzerland.

Viewed within the context of Cooper's activity in Europe, his two non-fictional works on Switzerland and his Swiss novel entitled ***The Headsman; or, The Abbaye des Vignerons. A Tale*** may admittedly be regarded as but a fragment of his creative output. Nonetheless, the role of Switzerland in the thinking of Cooper cannot be overestimated. The notion of an ancient Swiss republic fighting for her independence was obviously attractive to an American political observer residing in Europe. The sense of political kinship Cooper felt existed between the Swiss and Americans, their common principles and ideals, fired his imagination. But, Cooper, who was very much the historian, could also delve into Swiss history and point out mistakes from which America, too, could and should learn. The "Headsman," presented by Cooper as the hereditary Executioner of Berne, is such a tale: a word of warning, not so much directed at Switzerland, as at the young American republic.

The catalyst leading to this study was a humble exercise in textual comparison of the harbor scene in James Fenimore Cooper's ***The Headsman*** with that in "***The Helmsman of Lake Erie***." Cooper's ***The Headsman*** provides a harbor setting, which – when transposed into an American context – suggests striking parallels with "***The Helmsman of Lake Erie***." The Swiss national legend of Arnold von Winkelried as the name of the ship about to depart from the quay of the

city-state of Geneva is also both emphasized and significantly endorsed as to its authenticity by Cooper in the introductory paragraph. The object of this article is to make the references transparent within the context of both Cooper's fictional work and actual activity in Switzerland, while attempting to provide an objective assessment of what Cooper was up to. As ***The Headsman*** was published twelve years prior to publication of "***The Helmsman***," this paper will advocate the thesis that the legend of John Maynard does not have its ultimate source on American, but on Swiss soil, and is, in many ways, a metamorphosis of the legend of Arnold von Winkelried, who, in Cooper's words, "*deservedly ranks among the truest of those heroes of whom we have well-authenticated legends*" [- ***The Headsman***, 1st paragraph].

I.

TEXTUAL CONCERNS:

THE HARBOR SCENE IN "*THE HELMSMAN*"

AND THE QUAY SCENE IN *THE HEADSMAN*

The harbor scene of "***The Helmsman of Lake Erie***" did not fare well in later renderings. In fact, only fifteen years after publication in 1845, it had, in the rendering by the temperance leader, John Bartholomew Gough **[3]**, already been completely excised from the sketch as only so much deadwood – the obvious objective being to push dialogue and action to the fore without "wasting time" with exposition. Yet the harbor scene at Buffalo, depicting the "*bustle and confusion that attend the departure of a packet from a watering place*" [lines 23-24] can be quite useful to a researcher in quest of an antecedent text.

In ***The Headsman***, the harbor scene is begun on the very first page:

THE HEADSMAN

CHAPTER I.

[Epigraph:] Day glimmered and I went, a gentle breeze
Ruffling the Leman lake.
ROGERS.

THE year was in its fall, according to a poetical expression of our own, and the morning bright, as the fairest and swiftest bark that navigated the Leman lay at the quay of the ancient and historical town of Geneva, ready to depart for the country of Vaud. This vessel was called the *Winkelried*, in commemoration of Arnold of that name, who so generously sacrificed life and hopes to the good of his country, and who deservedly ranks among the truest of those heroes of whom we have well-authenticated legends. She had been launched at the commencement of the summer, and still bore at the fore-top-mast-head a bunch of evergreens, profusely ornamented with knots and streamers of riband, the offerings of the patron's female friends, and

> the fancied gage of success. The use of steam, and the presence of unemployed seamen of various nations, in this idle season of the warlike, are slowly leading to innovations and improvements in the navigation of the lakes of Italy and Switzerland, it is true; but time, even at this hour, has done little towards changing the habits and opinions of those who ply on these inland waters for a subsistence. [p. 9] . . . . .
> A gilded ball glittered on the summit of each mast, for no canvass was set higher than the slender and well-balanced yards, and it was above one of these that the wilted bush, with its gay appendages, trembled and fluttered in a fresh western wind. [p. 10]
>
> - ***The Headsman; or, The Abbaye des Vignerons. A Tale*** - The University of Michigan Historical Reprint Series, Ch. I (1st paragraph), Reprinted from the W. A. Townsend & Company Edition (New York, 1860).

A number of parallels are immediately obvious:

The 1845 text does not mention the word "*harbo*[*u*]*r*." Instead, we read:

> "…porters were hurrying along the narrow quay that juts out into the lake;…"
> - "***The Helmsman of Lake Erie***," lines 13-15

In ***The Headsman***, "*quay***,**" as in "***The Helmsman***," is used:

> "the fairest and swiftest bark that navigated the Leman lay at the quay of the ancient and historical town of Geneva,…" – 1st sentence of opening paragraph

Instead of Buffalo, we encounter "*the ancient and historic town of Geneva*." The "*inland waters*" are no longer Lake Erie but "*the Leman*." And the *Winkelried,* is, like the *Jersey*, ready to depart.

The tone is already set by "*the gentle breeze*" in the epigraph. The morning in ***The Headsman*** is "*bright*;" in "***The Helmsman***," "*pleasant*." In line 30 of "***The Helmsman***," the day is "*bright* blue."

The *Jersey* in "***The Helmsman***" is "*dressed* [A-version: *out*; B-version: *gaily*] *with many bright flags*;" the *Winkelried* is "*profusely ornamented with knots and streamers of riband*," otherwise referred to as "*gay appendages*."

While the *Jersey* is preparing to depart, the reader finds "*idlers lounging about*," a thought not that distant from "*unemployed seamen of various nations, in this idle season*" in ***The Headsman***.

But what about the microcosm of humanity on board the *Jersey*? A goodly number of pages in ***The Headsman*** are devoted to various individuals and their attempts to get on board the *Winkelried*. But, when the passengers are finally on board, one single paragraph at the end of Chapter IV suffices to paint a comprehensive picture:

> "The crowded and overloaded bark might have been compared to the vessel of human life, which floats at all times subject to the thousand accidents of a delicate and complicated machinery: the lake, so smooth and alluring in its present tranquility, but so capable of lashing its iron-bound coasts with fury, to a treacherous world, whose

> smile is almost always as dangerous as its frown; and, to complete the picture, the idle, laughing, thoughtless, and yet inflammable group that surrounded the buffoon, to the unaccountable medley of human sympathies, of sudden and fierce passions, of fun and frolic, so inexplicably mingled with the grossest egotism that enters into the heart of man: in a word, to so much that is beautiful and divine, with so much that would seem to be derived directly from the demons, a compound which composes this mysterious and dread state of being, and which we are taught, by reason and revelation, is only a preparation for another still more incomprehensible and wonderful."
>
> ***The Headsman***, Ch. IV, p. 75

The allegorical function of the "vessel" is explicitly stated. Lac Leman, though "*smooth and alluring in its **present*** [my emphasis] *tranquility*," can be treacherous. Here dramatic irony **[4]**, just as we find in "***The Helmsman***"– the hint to the reader that danger is lurking just around the corner – cannot be overlooked. Yet not merely the physical danger of the placid lake suddenly turning savage is touched upon. There is also the question of human nature itself – too often "*laughing, thoughtless, and yet inflammable*," too often (like the lake) capable of a hypocritical and deceptive "smile." The implicit danger of the unthinking masses being lured into the realm of the "buffoon" (in ***The Headsman***, the Neapolitan Pippo, the wily demagogue and, as the reader discovers in the last paragraph, a murderer) provides a menacing political aspect. The role played by superstition in the manipulation of the "passengers" can be seen not only in the adroitness of Pippo, but also in his accomplice in murder, the hypocritical pilgrim Conrad, who was "*altogether a disgusting picture of human depravity*" [Ch. I, p. 22].

The moral peril of "*grossest egotism*" is emphasized while allowing that our "*mysterious and dread state of being*" does include "*much that is beautiful and divine*." If "*grossest egotism*" is our greatest vice, then "selflessness and the willingness to help others" must be our greatest virtue. Finally, again on the moral level, the belief expressed in this paragraph that this world is but a training ground for a better world yet to come, the conviction that there is an afterlife which can make this world seem paltry by comparison, is also an essential aspect of "***The Helmsman***:" John Maynard can endure the agony of death because of his "*love of God*" [line 61]. His reward: "*He had died the death of a hero – I had almost said, of a martyr; his spirit was commended into his Father's hands*" [lines 174-177]. In other words, Cooper interweaves four essential aspects of human existence – the physical, the political, the moral, and the divine – into the "*crowded and overloaded* [and very allegorical] *bark*," the *Winkelried*.

II.

THE "WELL-AUTHENTICATED LEGEND" OF ARNOLD VON WINKELRIED

Not only do the parallel openings but also the very name of the vessel, which is tied to a legendary Swiss ***national hero*** suggest that ***The Headsman*** could serve as the model of a much later "***Helmsman***." For, as we shall see, Winkelried and Maynard have much in common.

Cooper first encountered a "*statue of Arnold*" in Stans [spelled "Stantz" by Cooper], Switzerland, on September 10, 1828:

> "Statue of Arnold [von Winkelried] in the place. His arms embraced a bundle of lances, to commemorate his self devotion [Latin, *devotio*: voluntary self-sacrifice]."

The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper, James Franklin Beard, Editor (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), Vol. I, p. 319, Wednesday, 10 September 1828.

A similar passage is in ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland***:

> "The noble Arnold de Winkelried has a statue in the square, in which he is represented embracing the heads of the Austrian lances." (Letter XV, p. 150)

And now, let us turn to the story of Arnold:

It was July 9, 1386 in the Battle of Sempach, in the Canton of Lucerne, that Arnold's name was immortalized. What was that "*well-authenticated legend*" of Arnold Struthen von Winkelried? In his ***Sketches of Switzerland*** [Part One], Cooper not only describes what happened but, once again, offers his own assessment:

> "We passed the lake of Sempach, on whose banks, in 1386, was fought one of the great battles that assured the liberties of this country. On this occasion, 1400 Swiss were opposed to 6000 of the Austrian chivalry. The latter dismounted, and, forming a phalanx that was thought impenetrable, stood with their lances presented, to receive the assault. The Swiss placed themselves in a column, presenting an angle, and charged. They were repulsed by a wall of iron. At this crisis, when the Austrians were beginning to open, in order to surround them, Arnold de Winkelried, a gentleman of Unterwalden, called to his companions to protect his wife and children. He then rushed forward, and being of great size and strength, he seized the ends of as many lances as his arms could embrace, and as he fell, pierced by their points, he drew his enemies down with him. By this opening, his countrymen penetrated, throwing the heavily armed Austrians into confusion.
>
> "This is the Swiss account of the matter, and, numbers excepted, it is probably true in all its leading points. . . . . The early ages of Switzerland, moreover, show great self-devotion in her people, and I believe this act of Winkelried rests on much better authority than the affair of Tell and the apple."
>
> ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland*** (Cooper Edition/SUNY), Letter XIII, p. 121.

What Cooper did not relate in this context was Arnold's promise: "*Ich will euch eine Gasse machen*!" In a literal sense, this means: "I'll make a passage for you!" In the German language, Winkelried's words have been given explicit direction in the saying: "*Der Freiheit eine Gasse machen*" [Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander, ***Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon***], or, "to open up a pathway to liberty," and hence Swiss independence. Arnold's body became the bridge over which his Swiss compatriots clambered. As the Austrian defenses were breached, this single act of heroism was a turning point in the battle. The lightly clad Swiss were more mobile and swifter than their heavily armored adversaries. The Habsburg army was routed and Switzerland saved. The legend of Arnold's selfless sacrifice in defense of his country made him, together with William [*French: Guillaume*] Tell, whose legend according to Cooper possibly rests on a shakier foundation, an icon of Swiss national independence.

Arnold von Winkelried opening up a pathway to Liberty!
Bilder-Conversations-Lexikon für das deutsche Volk. In vier Bänden (Leipzig: F. M. Brockhaus, 1837), Vol. 4, p. 164, "Sempach (Schlacht) - Facsimile Edition Reprint, (München: Verlag Enzyklopädische Literatur, 1977)

Rather than to view the Winkelried legend as the tale of one man's heroism, a more appropriate interpretation, which is more in keeping with the tenor of ***The Headsman***, would suggest that the legend is not that of a man but of a nation, striving to obtain independence and unwilling to sever the cultural ties that gave them their own identity as a people. Winkelried, the Cooperian "*scout*," *pathfinder*," *helmsman*," sacrifices his life to open up a pathway to liberty. Of particular significance is that the Battle of Sempach was not fought and won by trained Swiss soldiers but by the "little man," who was willing to lay down his life as soon as the borders of Lucerne were breached by Habsburg knights in armor. Sempach represents a victory for those who have grasped the importance of defending their country (and all that concept entails) against superior forces, and doing so not by coercion, but because they felt it was right. It is the task of those remaining to complete what Arnold began. It is also a task that Cooper, as a staunch Jacksonian Democrat, could easily identify with as thoroughly "American."

Even in Latin America, the Winkelried legacy has not been forgotten:

> "In 1983†, when the Argentine poet and Nobel Prize winner* Jorge Luis Borges in his '***Los conjurados'*** offered praise for the [Swiss] conspirators of 1291 and their descendants, who agreed to be 'judicious,' and 'to overlook their differences,' while emphasizing those things 'they held in common' — words of praise, in which Borges pointedly and exclusively referred to Winkelried by name, who had sacrificed his life 'so that his comrades at arms could make headway.' Borges concluded with the following confession: "Perhaps what I have said is simply not true; but *may it be prophetic*."

- ***Arnold von Winkelried: Mythos und Wirklichkeit; Nidwaldner Beiträge zum Winkelriedjahr 1986***, verfasst von **Guy O. Marchal, Walter Schaufelberger, Alois Steiner, Heinrich Thomman** (Stans, Switzerland, Verlag Historischer Verein Nidwalden, 1986), p. 100. (*Author's translation from the German*.)

†The year should read 1985.

*Although nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature several times, Borges was never a recipient.

Modern research into the actual Battle of Sempach and historical documentation has not been able to confirm the historicity of the Winkelried legend. **[5]** The Battle of Sempach was decided in the year 1386. A song commemorating Arnold von Winkelried's heroic deed is the first fragmentary evidence, and it was composed in 1533 [cf. ***Arnold von Winkelried: Mythos und Wirklichkeit***, pp. 92-93]. Apart from the decidedly late, and hence inconclusive documentation, the Winkelried lineage is strongly embedded in Swiss folklore, an aspect which should warrant caution.

Arnold's ancestor Struth Winkelried, for instance, is the heroic dragon killer, who – upon successfully dispatching the monster with both lance and sword – raises his sword as a sign of victory. Unfortunately, the weapon is still drenched in venomous dragon's blood, which runs down upon Struth's unprotected skin, killing him instantly. Nonetheless, Struth had rid the countryside of an evil that had been plaguing his countrymen. Similarly, Arnold was able to contribute significantly to ridding Switzerland of a similar "dragon" – the Austrians! The thistle that wraps her leaves around Struth and his doomed dragon symbolizes the warding off of evil spirits.

Illustration by Adolf Ehrhardt. In ***Deutsches Balladenbuch*** (Leipzig: Georg Wigand's Verlag, 1852), p. 93. A facsimile by Reprint-Verlag-Leipzig. The German ballad "Struth Winkelried" (1820) by the Swiss poet and artist Johann Martin Usteri (1763-1827) entitled "Struth Winkelried" (pp. 93-96) begins beneath Ehrhardt's dynamic illustration.

III.

THE MISSING ELEMENT IN THE HELMSMAN LEGEND

A reader of the 1845 "***Helmsman of Lake Erie***" will perhaps be surprised to note that no references are made to emigrants from Europe. The reason for this omission may seem particularly strange inasmuch as the *Erie* conflagration of August 9, 1841 is often regarded by those seeking an historical "core" behind the Maynard legend as the only significant steamboat disaster on Lake Erie prior to 1845, in which a ship did go up in flames. The European emigrants on board the *Erie* were sometimes reported to be German, sometimes referred to as Swiss – perhaps a combination of the two, or perhaps only Swiss from the German-speaking part of Switzerland. In any event, the "Swiss" are reported to have constituted the majority of casualties. **[6]**

The Swiss casualties, from "the land of [William] **TELL,**" were both praised and mourned in a Michigan newspaper only eleven days after the loss of the *Erie*:

> "The Swiss emigrants, who left their mountain land – the land of **TELL** – for a home in the West, where liberty might be enjoyed and a kindred atmosphere breathed, wealth and happiness secured, have departed from their birthplace, have separated families, have crossed the blue Atlantic, suffered toils and deprivation, but to find a grave in the bosom of Lake Erie. Their destiny, as well as all who perished, will draw from thousands many a 'sympathetic tear.'"
>
> – ***Kalamazoo Gazette***, August 20, 1841, Vol. VIII, No. 380, p. 2, c. 2.

They had come to America because there they breathed "*a kindred atmosphere*." The question of liberty – republican liberty – as only America and Switzerland in that day and age enjoyed, is at issue. For this reason, special homage was paid the Swiss victims of the *Erie*.

Cooper explicitly refers to the American nation as "*a people composed of emigrants from every country of the Christian world…. They did not come here by chance, nor do they stay here through necessity. They emigrated to improve their temporal conditions; and they remain, because they have been successful*" [***The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground***, "Preface," 1st page].

IV.

COOPER'S EMOTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE MAJESTY OF SWITZERLAND

Cooper himself, during his one-month stay at Vévey on Lake Geneva in 1832 (his second visit to Switzerland), felt something sacred about the surroundings. It will be noticed that at this very instant the majesty of America's Niagara Falls was always in the back of his mind:

> There lay the Leman [=Lake Geneva], broad, blue, and tranquil; with its surface dotted by sails, or shadowed by grand mountains; its shores varying from the impending precipice, to the sloping and verdant lawn; the solemn, mysterious, and glen-like valley of the Rhone; the castles, towns, villages, hamlets, and towers, with all the smiling acclivities loaded with vines, villas, and churches; the remoter pastures, out of which the brown chalets rose like subdued bas-reliefs, and the back-ground of *dents*,

peaks, and glaciers. Taking it together, it is one of the most ravishing views of an earth that is only too lovely for its evil-minded tenants; a world that bears about it, in every lineament, the impression of its divine Creator!

One of our friends used to tell an anecdote of the black servant of a visitor at Niagara, who could express his delight, on seeing the falls, in no other way than by peals of laughter; and perhaps I ought to hesitate to confess it, but I actually imitated the Negro, as this glorious view broke suddenly upon me. Mine, however, was a laugh of triumph, for I instantly discovered that my feelings were not quite worn out, and that it was still possible to awaken enthusiasm within me, by the sight of an admirable nature. ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine*** (Cooper Edition/SUNY) , Letter XVII, p. 168.

Yet another aspect, with particular reference to the Leman, is its close associations with the Romantic Movement in European literature. The engraving below is a depiction of Lake Leman only a few years after Cooper's visit. That the view is from "*opposite the Ville of Lord Byron at Coligny*" suggests linkage with British Romanticism. **[7]** Cooper refers specifically to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) in his description of the mountainous landscape:

"On the vast débris of the mountains clustered the hamlets of Clarens, Montreux, Châtelard, and all those other places, since rendered so familiar to the reader of fiction by the vivid pen of Rousseau." - ***The Headsman***, Ch.V, p. 87

"**LAKE LEMAN**."
Engraving in the French translation of William Beattie's *Switzerland*, vol. 1 – 1837. (*Author's library*)

V.

SWISS SYMPATHIES FOR AMERICA

Not just the physical features of Switzerland, but its inhabitants as well made a lasting impression on Cooper:

> A day or two since I met a *Véveysan* on the public promenade, with whom business had led to a slight acquaintance. We saluted, and pursued our walk together. The conversation soon turned on the news from America, where nullification **[8]** is, just now, menacing disunion. The Swiss are the only people, in Europe, who appear to me to feel any concern in what has been generally considered to be a crisis in our affairs. I do not wish to be understood as saying that individuals of other nations do not feel the same friendly interest in our prosperity, for perhaps a million such might be enumerated in the different nations of Europe, the extreme liberals everywhere looking to our example as so much authority in favour of their doctrines; but, after excluding the mass, who have too much to do to live, to trouble themselves with concerns so remote, so far as my knowledge extends, the great majority on this side of the Atlantic, without much distinction of country, Switzerland excepted, are waiting in confidence and impatience, for the knell of the Union.
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> ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine*** (Cooper Edition/SUNY) , Letter XIX, p. 186.

VI.

JEAN DESCLOUX – AN OLD SWISS LAKEMAN AND JAMES FENIMORE COOPER: "THE BUSY CONVERSATION ON POLITICS" ("THE HELMSMAN," LINES 31-32)

The land of **TELL**, the home of liberty, and the Swiss concern that the American experiment should succeed are all issues that deeply moved Cooper. Let us return to the town of Vévey (in the canton of Vaud; *German*: Waadt) on the northeastern shore of Lac Leman, otherwise known as Lake Geneva. Cooper and his family would go out onto the lake with an old boatman, "*who rows us for an hour or two almost every evening along shore*." The man's name was Jean Descloux. Cooper described Jean in terms starkly reminiscent of John Maynard:

> "In short, honest Jean [=John] Descloux was a fair sample of that homebred, upright common-sense which seems to form the instinct of the mass, and which it is gradually the fashion to deride in those circles in which mystification passes for profound thinking, bold assumption for evidence, a simper for wit, particular personal advantages for liberty, and in which it is deemed a mortal offence against good manners to hint that Adam and Eve were the common parents of mankind."
>
> ***The Headsman***, "Introduction," p. v.

Regarding the best of all forms of government, both Cooper and honest Jean/John were "*absolutely of the same mind*:"

> Monsieur Descloux then spoke of the revolutions he had seen. He remembered the time when Vaud was a province of Berne. His observations on this subject were rational and were well seasoned with wholesome common sense. His doctrine was

simply this. "If one man rule, he will rule for his own benefit, and that of his parasites; if a minority rule, we have many masters instead of one," (honest Jean had got hold of a cant saying of the privileged, which he very ingeniously converted against themselves,) "all of whom must be fed and served; and if the majority rule, and ruled wrongfully, why the minimum of harm is done." He admitted that the people might be deceived to their own injury, but then, he did not think it was quite as likely to happen, as that they should be oppressed when they were governed without any agency of their own. On these points, the American and the Vaudois were absolutely of the same mind. ***The Headsman***, "Introduction," pp. vi-vii.

VII.

SWITZERLAND – THE MODEL REPUBLIC FOR AMERICA TO IMITATE?

Cooper's interest in Switzerland can easily be grasped by a consideration of her heterogeneous population (a challenge confronting the young American republic with increasing immigration), the poetic magic of her landscape, and – most importantly – her tradition of democracy. As ***Encyclopædia Britannica*** puts it:

> "Switzerland owes its existence, however, no less to the will of its inhabitants than to the exigencies of geography. With one-quarter of its area comprising high Alps, lakes, and barren rock and with no seaboard and few natural resources other than waterpower, Switzerland has managed to impose unity on diverse races, religions, and languages: for almost 700 years it has maintained the world's oldest and the European mainland's most verile democracy, achieving an almost unrivalled standard of living."
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> ***Encyclopædia Britannica***, 15th Edition, 1986 printing, ***Macropædia***, Vol. 28, "***Switzerland***," p. 351, c. 2

Indeed, for the politically minded, Switzerland claims an exceptional role:

> "Students of politics have generally agreed that Switzerland contains a larger variety of instructive experiments in political and economic democracy than any other living nation. Nowhere else has the direct personal participation of the body of citizens in acts of government been applied in so many different ways, fortifying or in many instances superseding the indirect modes of popular control known as representative institutions."
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> **Henry Demarest Lloyd,** ***A Sovereign People: A Study of Swiss Democracy*** (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1907), p. 1. Elibron Classics Series, 2006 reprint.

Although it is true that Switzerland in the year 1832 had come a long way since a sacred oath of alliance was affirmed on August 1, 1291 by the three initial "forest cantons" (*German*: *Waldstätte*) Uri, Schwyz, and Nidwalden, the resulting "Everlasting League" (*German*: *Ewiger Bund*) constituted the seed which, only in the course of centuries, would flower into the much later Swiss Confederation, the new federal state of 1848.

In the ***Headsman***, Switzerland is far from perfect. Justice, according to Cooper, was only blind to the transgressions of the privileged. Maso, a social outcast due to his illegitimate birth (similarly, Balthazar, who implements the decrees of justice, may also be viewed as a social outcast) makes the following statement:

> "I am no stranger to that which men call justice and know how to honor and respect its decrees as they deserve. Justice, Signori, is the weak man's scourge and the strong man's sword: it is a breast-plate and back-plate to the one and a weapon to be parried by the other. In short, it is a word of fair import on the tongue, but of unequal application in the deed." - Ch. XXVIII, p. 470

Even stronger language is used by Maso in the following chapter:

> "Let the great of the earth give but half the care to prevent, that they show to punish, offences against themselves, and what is now called justice will no longer be a stalking-horse to enable a few to live at the cost of the rest." – Ch. XXIX, p. 481

Cooper's fascination with Switzerland was due in large part to his concern that her democratic traditions could be eroded by an established aristocratic and privileged *group*, not, however, by one man. The nightmare that a similar fate might overtake the United States was to plague Cooper for the remainder of his life. Cooper was particularly suspicious of the U.S. Congress, and strongly supported the veto power of the President (and, in no small part, Andrew Jackson, who was not afraid to make liberal use of the veto):

> "It may be liberty in England to repress the exercise of the veto power in the crown, as separated from parliamentary majorities: while, with parliamentary majorities it becomes unnecessary. But in America, *the veto is instituted in the interests of liberty* [Cooper's emphasis]. The greatest power, and, of necessity, the power most to be apprehended in this country, is that of Congress. The veto is given to the Executive, therefore, that, as a representative of the entire constituency, he may check the greatest power of the state in the exercise of its authority. The fact that he is only one man, and that Congress is composed of many men, gives additional grounds for sustaining him in the discharge of a duty so delicate, *since, it is notorious, that in a really free state, there is far more danger to be apprehended from bodies of men, than from individuals* [my emphasis]. Our own history abounds with instances of the Executives shrinking from the responsibility of doing their duties, on the one hand, and of legislative innovations on the other."
>
> - ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland***, Letter XIII, footnote, p.128

On Sunday, September 9, 1832, during his one-month residence at Vévey, Cooper made the following entry in his journal:

> "The Berne affair excites a good deal of concern, for it would seem that the conspiracy was bold and extended. I have no doubt but there will be a severe struggle yet in this country before the people will obtain their rights. Prussia and Austria sustain the aristocracy, and if the truth were known, I think it would be found that the governments of neither France nor England wish to see popular institutions succeed anywhere." - ***The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper***, Vol. II, Journal XIX, p. 331

In ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine*** (=***Sketches of Switzerland. Part Second***), Cooper makes the following statement:

> "Soon after we reached Berne, François came to me in a mysterious manner, to inquire if I had heard any news of importance. I had heard nothing, and he then told me, that many arrests had just taken place, and that a conspiracy of the old aristocracy had been discovered, which had a counter-revolution for its object. I say a counter-revolution,

> for you ought to have heard that great political changes have occurred in Switzerland since 1830, France always giving an impulse to the cantons. Democracy is in the ascendant, and divers old opinions, laws and institutions have been the sacrifice. This, in the land of the Bürgerschaft, has necessarily involved great changes, and the threatened plot is supposed to be an effort of the old, privileged party to regain their power." - Letter XVI, p. 159

It would thus appear that particularly the Swiss cities, such as Berne, as experienced by Cooper, offer less a role model to be imitated than a casebook study of the dangers confronting a democracy and the provisions required to ward off the "dragon" of established aristocratic privilege. The following quote is enlightening:

> "It is of supreme significance to note that, whereas in other lands what practical liberty existed was chiefly found in more favoured cities, in Switzerland it was the peasants who kept alike the forms and the substance of democracy. While in the cities Berne, Lucerne, Zug, and even Zürich, aristocratic cliques were constantly endeavouring, with more or less success, to control the city, the old confederating states of Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, Glarus, were fully democratic republics, sovereign peoples exercising directly their power through popular assemblies."
>
> **Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Sovereign People***, Ch. II, p. 15

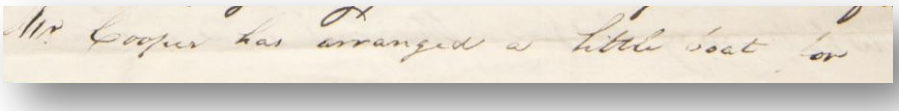
VIII.

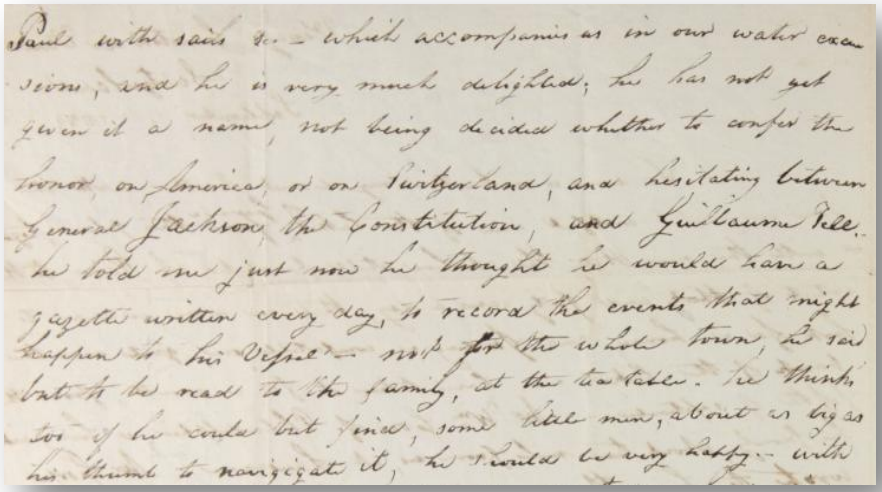
LITTLE PAUL'S TOY BOAT AND THE BEGINNINGS OF A LITERARY ADVENTURE

On a rainy day (September 11, 1832), with nothing better to do, Cooper and old John (here no longer called "Jean") decided to make a toy boat for Cooper's son Paul:

> Dear ----,
>
> We have had a touch of the equinox, and the Leman has been in a foam, but its miniature anger, though terrible enough at times, to those who are embarked on its waters, can never rise to the dignity of a surf and a rolling sea. The rain kept me housed, and old John and I seized the occasion to convert a block of pine into a Leman bark, for P[aul]. The next day proved fair, our vessel, fitted with two latine sails, and carrying a weather helm, was committed to the waves, and away she went, on a wind, toward the opposite shore. P[aul], of course, was delighted, and clapped his hands, until, perceiving that it was getting off the land, he compelled us to enter the boat and give chase. A chase it was, truly; for the little thing went skipping from wave, to wave, in such a business-like manner, that I once thought it would go all the way to Savoy. ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine*** (Cooper Edition/SUNY) , Letter XX, p. 194.

Then there was the thorny question of the name little Paul should give his vessel. What follows is an excerpt from Mrs. Cooper's letter of September 10, 1832, to her sister Martha De Lancey:





Courtesy of The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library,
New Haven, Connecticut.

Last line of 1st page:

Mr. Cooper has arranged a little boat for

2nd page:

Paul* with sails &c. – which accompanies us in our water excursions, and he is very much delighted; he has not yet given it a name, not being decided whether to confer the honor on America or on Switzerland, and hesitating between General Jackson, the Constitution, and Guillaume [=William] Tell. He told me just now he thought he would have a gazette written every day, to record the events that might happen to his Vessel – not for the whole town, he said but to be read to the family, at the tea table. He thinks too if he could but find, some little men, about as big as his thumb to navigate it, he would be very happy.

***Paul Fenimore Cooper, 1824 - 1895**

A toy boat – unnamed – on the Leman with its "*miniature anger*," the question of *whom* the vessel should represent, the hope of finding "*some little men, about as big as his thumb, to navigate it*" — this is the stuff which can lead to works of literature! Did Paul's "toy boat" only sail on Lac Leman – or was it also given a chance on Lake Erie?

The vessel's name in ***The Headsman*** is, however, neither the *General Jackson*, the *Constitution*, nor *Guillaume Tell*, but the *Winkelried*. **[9]** Yet all four names evoke kindred associations as staunch defenders of the American and Swiss republics:

> "I [=Cooper] do not believe there is such a thing, in all the cantons, as a man, for instance, who pines for the Prussian despotism! They will take service under kings, be their soldiers, body-guards – real Dugald Dalgettys – but when the question comes to Switzerland, one and all appear to think that the descendants of Winkelried and Stauffacher, must be republicans."

Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine (Cooper Edition), Letter XXIII, p. 222.

IX.

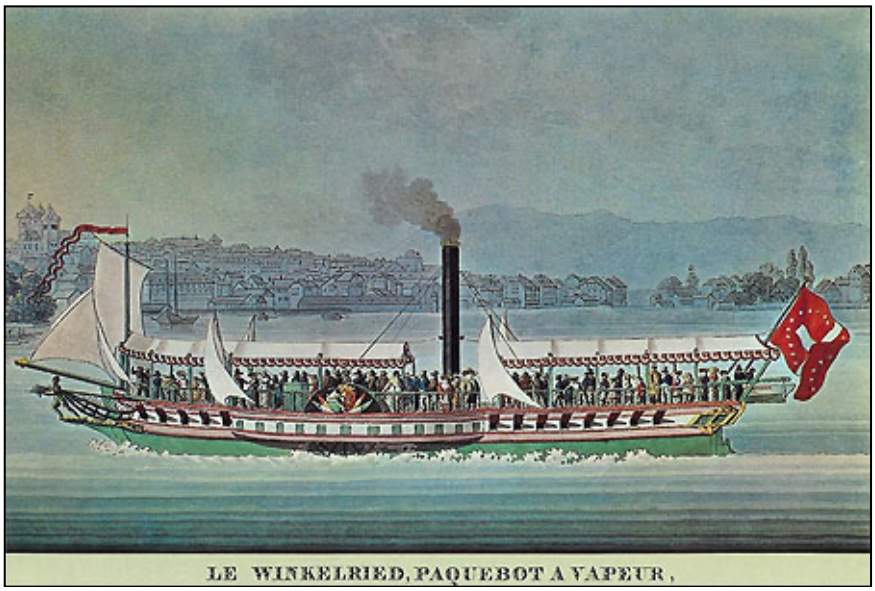
AN ACTUAL STEAMER NAMED THE *WINKELRIED*

Was there a steamer named the *Winkelried* actually plying the waters of Lake Leman? Although the steamboat named the *Leman* **[10]** is mentioned in Cooper's ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland***, describing his *first* steamboat excursion on Lake Geneva, his description of his second visit to Switzerland refers to the *Winkelried* twice:

> 1) "After remaining at Vévey a day or two longer, I went to Geneva, in *the Winkelried*, which had got a new commander; one as unaffected as his predecessor had been fantastical. Our progress was slow, and, although we reached the port early enough to prevent being locked out, with the exception of a passage across Lake George, in which the motion seemed expressly intended for the lovers of the picturesque, I think this the most deliberate run, or rather *walk*, I ever made by steam."
>
> ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine*** (Cooper Edition), Letter XX, p. 195

> 2) After spending a few more days in the same delightful and listless enjoyments, my friend C[ox] came over from Lausanne, and we embarked in the *Winkelried*, on the afternoon of the 25th September [1832], as she hove-to off our mole, on her way up the lake."
>
> ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine*** (Cooper Edition), Letter XXI, p. 204.

The *Winkelried* Cooper refers to in his ***Gleanings*** was indeed a steamboat built in Geneva, 29 meters in length and with a capacity of up to 300 passengers. It plied the waters of Lac Léman from 1824 to 1842. In 1871, a more modern steamer, also named the *Winkelried*, began operation and was in service on Lac Leman until 1918. Interestingly, in the days of the first *Winkelried* steamer, there was also the *Léman*, in operation by 1826. The *Guillaume Tell* had already been constructed three years earlier.**[11]**



The First Winkelried Steamboat on Lac Léman

Returning to the first paragraph of ***The Headsman***, the question may legitimately be asked as to whether Cooper, in the back of his mind, was in fact thinking of *his Winkelried* steamer, when pointing out that ***The Headsman's*** *Winkelried* had only recently been launched — even the ribbons and evergreens celebrating her completion having not yet been removed, while, at the same time, emphasizing the advances in navigation through the "*use of steam*."

> ***The Headsman***:
> "She had been launched at the beginning of the summer, and still bore at the fore-top-mast-head a bunch of evergreens, profusely ornamented with knots and streamers of riband, the offerings of the patron's female friends, and the fancied gage of success." – Ch. I, first page, p. 9 (Michigan Historical Reprint Series)

> ***The Headsman***:
> "The use of steam, and the presence of unemployed seamen of various stations, in this idle season of the warlike, are slowly leading to innovations and improvements in the navigation of the lakes of Italy and Switzerland." *– ibid.*

However one may wish to construe the passage suggesting that the *Winkelried* of ***The Headsman*** is also one of those "innovations and improvements," i.e., a steam-powered boat, the disappointment will be great in the pages following, for the good ship *Winkelried* seems – like any vessel dependent upon sails – to require a suitable wind in order to make headway. Also, in spite of the fact that the time of the setting remains indefinite, it is obvious that the "tale" does not take place in the early 19th century (with the introduction of steamboats), but in the 18th century. It would appear that Cooper's parenthetical comment on "*the use of steam*" is, on the one hand, an intellectual slip and that he was simply "thinking out loud," while neglecting to cross out what can only be seen as an anachronism. On the other hand, it seems obvious that Cooper was also intent upon giving *his* steamboat, pregnant with the associations Arnold von Winkelried would naturally evoke, an intellectual anchor in ***The Headsman***.

X.

THE HEADSMAN: A DIDACTIC ALLEGORY FOR REPUBLICS

Cooper's ***Headsman*** is a novel composed of four major divisions. Part One is the near-tragedy of the *Winkelrie*d on Lac Leman due to a sudden storm; Part Two, the allegorical wine-growers' festivities at Vévey and the aborted wedding ceremony of Christine, the Headsman's daughter; Part Three, the near-tragedy during an Alpine trek; Part Four, a murder mystery with a surprise ending. As can well be imagined, the novel is full of suspense and an excellent read, no matter how convoluted or "gothic" the plot. Yet critics have faulted Cooper on at least three counts: a) Cooper's supposedly tiring descriptions of the Alps (although these selfsame critics must own that Cooper often attains poetic heights in his landscape portrayals), b) the lengthy depiction of the wine-growers' festival at Vévey, and c) his artificially contrived ending in which Sigismund and Maso (who, it turns out, are half-brothers: the former legitimate, the latter illegitimate) are not left to their preprogrammed fate but are spared (Sigismund is freed from the onus of becoming the future executioner of Berne, will get the girl of his dreams and enjoy the riches and hereditary privilege of his father, the Doge of Genoa; and Maso, by definition underprivileged and in this case innocent, will at least escape an unjust execution simply because the sons of dukes are not executed.) Although this reader might have cautioned Cooper on using the adjective "*ferruginous*" eight times as a description of the color of Alpine rocks,

the moral of the tale is, as one would expect, quite Cooperian, and not at all as completely illogical as critics have generally maintained — for only through the heart-felt exercise of Christian "*mildness*" can society be radically transformed for the better. Maso puts it this way:

> "Let the judge feel a father's mildness, the laws possess that pure justice which is of things that are not perverted, and society become what it claims to be, a community of mutual support, and, my life on it, châtelain, thy functions will be lessened of most of their weight and of all their oppression." - ***The Headsman,*** Ch. XXVIII, p. 462

Given a society constructed on the precepts of "a father's mildness," there would be no need for a "headsman of Berne." The brave mariner Maso would also not have been cast on society as a *filius nullius* (Cooper's delightful phrase in ***Two Admirals*** comes to mind) or bastard, condemned – so to speak – before he even had a chance to prove his merit, and forced to seek his way as best he could, often at odds with an unfair system of justice:

> "A man who had led his [=Maso's] life, was not to learn at this late day, that the want of eyes in Justice oftener means blindness to the faults of the privileged, than the impartiality that is assumed by the pretending emblem."
> ***The Headsman***, Ch. XXIX, pp. 481- 482

The message behind ***The Headsman*** is frightfully clear: Even a republic can be corrupted by laws that are only aimed to extend privilege to the chosen few. That Cooper stands that privilege on its head in the case of the deeply religious and meek-mannered Balthazar, a most unlikely candidate for the doubtful "privilege" of the, according to Cooper, *hereditary* office of the Headsman of Berne, to show the injustice of a self-perpetuating system, is Cooper's own ironic twist. ***The Headsman***, in the veiled characters it presents, is a masquerade, as can be seen in its subtitle, ***The Abbaye*** **[12]** ***des Vignerons***, the wine festival of "mummers," whose allegorical disguises warn the reader to judge carefully between festive appearance and sober reality – implicit in the latter are the dangers that confront any republic where a privileged class can usurp basic rights under the guise of "justice."

VEVEY 1905 Medallion,
Front side:
"FETE DES VIGNERONS"
(*Author's collection)*

1905 Medallion,
Reverse side:
"FETE DES VIGNERONS,"

Cooper strains the concept of "privilege" by going out of his way to show that a hereditary "privilege" can be inhumane and make its unwilling recipient an object of derision. Moreover, Cooper even goes so far as to choose as his "Executioner" the mild-mannered and sensitive

Balthazar, a man who would ordinarily not even swat a fly, and who is himself aghast at the horror of his office. Balthazar, in attempting to find a loophole in the decadent feudal laws of Berne, does everything in his power to disguise Christine, his daughter, and Sigismund (who, when "unmasked" at the end of the novel, is *not* his son) so that they will not be subject to the derision arising from the hereditary curse.

When Christine is "unmasked," i.e., her true identity revealed, during her wedding ceremony at the masked festivities at Vévey, were the masses, and especially the intended bridegroom, culpable for their actions? - They knew all too well the horrors the Headsman represented. The bridegroom, Jacques Colis (whose murder afterwards transforms the fourth part of the novel into a detective story), admittedly, had known Christine's true identity and had received a generous dowry to keep the secret hushed up. But, now that his future wife's identity was exposed, he adamantly refused to take his vows. The spectators, at first ecstatic that such a beautiful girl would be wed during their festival, became a vicious, cursing crowd. The virtuous and meek-mannered girl, whose only sin was that she was the daughter of the "Headsman," was ruthlessly placed upon the pillory of public scorn.

The treatment Christine endured was, though at least in part understandable, both brutal and unjustified. The mistake the masses made was to condemn a young girl rather than the source from which their resentment issued: to follow Cooper's chain of thought, the true perpetrator was the aristocratic system of Berne, not the Headsman, who was required to implement its decrees against his will, under the masquerade of "justice."

Cooper was always deeply concerned that the masses might too easily be manipulated by "the powers that be." In ***The Headsman***, the victims, like Christine and even Balthazar, are innocent, while the true "executioners" remain hidden behind their masks. Cooper's ***The Bravo***, a portrayal of the masked manipulation of the masses in the "Republic" of Venice, published in 1831, contains a similar and equally frightening message. No doubt the abortive results of the 1830 Revolution in France to make General Lafayette, Cooper's close friend and an icon of the American War of Independence, President of a new French Republic, indirectly fueled both ***The Bravo*** and ***The Headsman***. The message in the years 1830 to 1833: a word of warning to the young republic Cooper held sacred, the United States, to learn from the mistakes of an aristocratic Berne; from those of Venice, an oligarchy masquerading as a republic; and from that chaotic monarchy unable to find her way to the safe haven of democracy, France.

The 1831 revolt in Poland has not been mentioned. While residing in Paris, both Cooper and Lafayette were actively supporting Polish revolutionaries who were attempting to free their country from the shackles of Russian domination. Certainly Cooper, through his seven-year stay in Europe (1826-1833) and the close attention he paid to European politics and the course of events, was in a favorable position to communicate his impressions. It was Cooper's misfortune that the American audience he had particularly targeted was unwilling to grasp the essential fact that "a Swiss tale," for instance, might also contain a valid message for all Americans. But, perhaps more disillusioning, there was a wholesale tendency to regard any reference to governmental systems in literature as a violation of what fiction should be about. To quote from the ***New-England Magazine***:

> "It is bad taste to warp a production of creative art so as to suit a particular theory of Government." **[13]**

XI.

THE CATARACT THAT PRODUCED THE HURRICANE

Cooper's first thought upon seeing Lake Leman was of Niagara. In his description of the cause of the tempest that was awaiting the *Winkelried*, an amazing allusion to a "cataract," not of water but of "condensed and chilled" air, is made:

> "All who have ever been subject to their influence know that there is nothing more uncertain than the winds. Their fickleness has passed into a proverb; but their inconstancy, as well as their power, from the fanning air to the destructive tornado, are to be traced to causes that are sufficiently clear, though hid in their nature from the calculations of our forethought. *The tempest of the night was owing to the simple fact, that a condensed and chilled column of the mountains had pressed upon the heated substratum of the lake, and the latter, after a long resistance, suddenly finding vent for its escape, had been obliged to let in the cataract from above* [my emphasis]. As in all extraordinary efforts, whether physical or moral, reaction would seem to be the consequence of excessive action, the currents of air, pushed beyond their proper limits, were now setting back again, like a tide on its reflux. This cause produced the northern gale that succeeded the hurricane."
> ***The Headsman,*** Ch. VII, p. pp. 134-135

Thus the "*miniature anger*" [cf. p. 13 of this essay] of Lake Leman with an American poet's admixture from the "Cataract" – a veiled sobriquet of Niagara Falls? **[14]** – can become a boiling cauldron of hell.

XII.

THE *WINKELRIED* AND THE *JERSEY* – FURTHER PARALLELS

Just as the *Jersey* is deftly steered to the saving shore, the *Winkelried*, lightened of her excessive load, withstands the fury of the storm and is masterfully steered by Maso to Vévey:

> "Maso shaped his course by the beacon that still blazed in the grate of old Roger de Blonay. With his eye riveted on the luff of his sail, his hip bearing hard against the tiller, and a heart that relieved itself, from time to time, with bitter sighs, he ruled the bark like a presiding spirit."
> ***The Headsman***, Ch. VII, p. 137

The motifs that follow are to be found in both "The Helmsman of Lake Erie" and ***The Headsman***. This, of course, is not to say that they do not reoccur in additional works by Cooper. **[15]**

1) *The problem of footing*

In "***The Helmsman***" [lines 164-167], the question of how, exactly, John Maynard died is left unanswered:

> "How he perished was not known; whether, dizzied by the smoke, he lost his footing in endeavoring to come forward, and fell overboard, or whether he was suffocated by dense smoke, his comrades could not tell." (lines 164-169)

In ***The Headsman***, we read the following.

> "The work now proceeded with greater security to those engaged, for, hitherto the motion of the bark, and the unequal footing, frequently rendered their situations, in the darkness and confusion, to the last degree hazardous."
>
> ***The Headsman***, Ch. VI, p. 109.

During the voyage, there were several persons who fell overboard, some of whom were saved. One who was not saved, however, was a romantic "ill-fated scholar" who thought often of the girl he loved. While Maso and the young student were tossing a bale overboard, "the bark lurched:"

> "Maso recovered his footing, which had been deranged by the unexpected movement, with a seaman's dexterity, but his companion was no longer at his side. Kneeling on the gangway, he perceived the dark bale disappearing in the element, with the feet of the Westphalian dragging after. He bent forward to grasp the rising body, but it never returned to the surface, being entangled in the cords, or, what was equally probable, retained by the frantic grasp of the student, whose mind had yielded to the awful character of the night."
>
> ***The Headsman*** , Ch. VI, p. 112.

The danger of losing one's footing was also a hazard in the sleigh ride on the frozen Hudson River in ***Satanstoe***, one of Cooper's most thrilling and masterfully written action episodes. The first-person narrator, Corny Littlepage, relates how Anneke and he himself were able to make it over the slippery cakes of ice:

> "Fortunately, I wore buckskin moccasins, over my boots, and their rough leather aided me greatly in maintaining my footing. Anneke, too, had socks of cloth, without which I do not think she could have possibly moved."
>
> ***Satanstoe*** – Cooper Edition, Ch. XVII, p. 241)

2) *The importance of "five minutes"*

In "***The Helmsman***" [lines 146-147], the Captain asks John Maynard:

> "Could you hold on five minutes longer." (lines 146-147)

In ***The Headsman***, when Baron Melchior de Willading and his old friend Signor Grimaldi fell overboard, the question of how long they could hold on was paramount:

> "Although the time appeared an age to all who awaited the result, scarcely five minutes had elapsed since the accident occurred and the hurricane had reached them. There was still hope, therefore, for those who yet remained in the water."
>
> ***The Headsman***, Ch. VII, p. 130.

The motif of "five minutes" is employed by Cooper in his works time and again. The thrilling tale of the sleigh ride on the frozen Hudson River in ***Satanstoe*** is an example from the year

1845. Corny (Cornelius) Littlepage pointed out that five minutes spelt out the difference between life and death:

> "Five minutes longer on the ice of the main channel, and we should have been swept away." (***Satanstoe*** – Cooper Edition, Ch. XVII, p. 240)

3) *Bad company*

In "***The Helmsman***" [lines 52-55], old John Maynard could not always choose his company:

> "He had, in the worst time, a cheerful word and a kind look for those with whom he was thrown; cast, often enough, into bad company…" (lines 52-55)

In ***The Headsman***, Maso stood out as a much higher caliber of man than the noisy passengers:

> "In the midst of the noisy, clamorous merriment of all around him, his [=Maso's] restrained and rebuked manner had won upon the favor of the more privileged, who had unavoidably noticed the difference, and had prepared the way to a more frank communication between the party of the noble, and one who, if not their equal in the usual points of worldly distinction, was greatly superior to those among whom he had been accidentally cast by the chances of his journey."
> ***The Headsman***, Ch. V, p. 76.

4) *Measures to save the women passengers*

In "***The Helmsman***" [lines 135-136], in contrast to the actual *Erie*, an attempt was made to save the women:

> "…the sailors were sawing planks on which to lash the women…" (lines 135-136)

In ***The Headsman***, women were not lashed to planks, so that they could survive in the water, but to the masts, so that they would not be washed overboard:

> "Adelheid (=Baron Melchior de Willading's ailing daughter) and her female attendants were already lashed to the principle masts, and ropes were given to the others around her, as indispensible precautions…"
> ***The Headsman***, Ch. VII, p. 120.

5) *Preparing for the last struggle for life*

In "***The Helmsman***" [lines 136-138], the most courageous on board were about to leave the *Jersey*:

> "…the boldest were throwing off their coats and waistcoats, and ***preparing for one long struggle for life***" [my emphasis].(lines 136-139)

In ***The Headsman***, the young Swiss Sigismund, who was in love with Adelheid, had voluntarily jumped overboard in an attempt to save her father. The following moving description of Sigismund's struggle follows:

> "For a single painful instant, in one of those disheartening moments of despair that will come over the stoutest, his [=Sigismund's] hand was about to relinquish its hold

of the baron, and ***to make the last natural struggle for life*** [my emphasis]; but that fair and modest picture of maiden loveliness and truth, which had so long haunted his waking hours and adorned his night-dreams, interposed to prevent the act. After this brief and fleeting weakness, the young man seemed endowed with new energy. He swam stronger, and with greater apparent advantage, than before."

The Headsman , Ch. VII, p. 128.

6) *Neither screams nor groans* [16]

In "***The Helmsman***" [lines 157-158], John Maynard, in spite of great pain, remained silent:

"… [John Maynard] bore the agony ***without a scream or a groan***" [my emphasis].
(lines 157-158)

In ***The Headsman***, when the ill-fated student who had lost his footing fell overboard, all was silent:

"The life of Il Maledetto had been one of great vicissitudes and peril. He had often seen men pass suddenly into the other state of existence, and had been calm himself amid the cries, the groans and, what is far more appalling, the execrations of the dying, but never before had he witnessed so brief and silent an end."

The Headsman, Ch. VI, p. 113

7) *Maso's physical appearance*

Although Maso, the illegitimate son of the Prince of Genoa, is only thirty, his hair "*was already beginning to be sprinkled with gray*" [Ch. V, p. 77]. The effect of "exposure" is a favorite motif in Cooper's descriptions of outdoorsmen:

"That hardened and rude appearance, the consequence of exposure . . . rendered it difficult to pronounce within ten years his [=Maso's] real age…"

The Headsman, Ch. XXIX, p. 495

The adjectives "*weather-beaten*" [Ch. XXXI, p. 518] and "*sun-burnt*" [Ch. XXVIII, p. 461] are also used to describe Maso. Compare "***The Helmsman***:"

"Old John Maynard was at the wheel; a bluff, weather-beaten sailor, tanned by many a burning summer day, and by many a winter tempest." [lines 46-47]

XIII.

A MODEL OF THE MODEL?

The question whether at least part of the Geneva quay scene and the encounter with the tempest might not have consciously or unconsciously been borrowed by Cooper from an earlier source is treated in the scholarly article by Thomas R. Palfrey, which – over the years – seems to have been either completely forgotten or sadly neglected: "***Cooper and Balzac***: '***The Headsman***'" **[17].** Palfrey, with professional acumen, compares Honoré de Balzac's ***Jésus-Christ en Flandres*** [=***Christ in Flanders*** **[18]**], published in February 1831, with both the quay scene and the encounter with the tempest in Cooper's ***The Headsman***, published in 1833. The revolutionary aspect in Palfrey's article is that, although, as Palfrey phrases it, "*much has been*

said of Honoré de Balzac's enthusiasm for, and his indebtedness to, James Fenimore Cooper" [p. 335], Palfrey demonstrates that influence and indebtedness may well have been reciprocal.

The opening scene in Balzac's short story, "*this quaint legend of old Flanders*" ["Dedication"], is the departure of a shallop loaded with passengers of quite disparate social station. Among those on board is a stranger who, as it gradually becomes clear, is Jesus Christ. The route is from Ostend to the island of Cadzand. The moral of the tale is, "*Those who have faith shall be saved; let them follow me*!" [p. 26] or, more succinctly, "*Belief is Life*" [p. 41]. That Cooper might well have been struck by Christ in the role of a "pathfinder," serving as a guide and miraculously helping those passengers who could believe in him *to walk* over the turbulent sea to the saving shore, does not sound improbable.

Palfrey is right that a striking number of parallel elements are to be found in the two tales in which the *Winkelried* and Balzac's unnamed vessel encounter a tempest. His conjecture that Cooper, while residing in France, may have taken an interest in Balzac's work is legitimate, even though there is no record remaining of such a literary pursuit. It should also be considered that Cooper may not only have quite reasonably delved into French literature while learning French, but that he actually tried his hand in composing a satire in French: its heading in English, "***No Steamboats – A Vision***." The piece, written in late 1832, and published in Paris, represented a creative foray by Cooper into the French language and was originally entitled "***Point de Bateaux à Vapeur – Une Vision***" **[19]**.

Cooper's own (perhaps overly exuberant) pride in his creation can be appreciated in the following comment:

> "Bring back my Cent-et-un with you, for I prize my exploits in the French language more than all the rest together." **[20]**
>
> ***Letters and Journals***, Vol. VI, p. 323, Letter 333a. To Colonel Thomas Aspinwall, [1832-1833].

Two aspects of ***Christ in Flanders***, which are not discussed by Palfrey, deserve mention. The first point is that the very idea of linking a near-disaster during a tempest with the Executioner of Berne may have had its subtle origin in Balzac's description of the sky:

> "If written language might borrow of spoken language some of the bold figures of speech invented by the people, it might be said with the soldier that 'the weather has been routed,' or, as the peasant would say, 'the sky glowered like an executioner.'" (p. 16)

The second point has to do with language comparison. During such tedious study, it is, of course, heartening when a match can be found, which even contains *a comment* by the author. One example in "***The Helmsman of Lake Erie***" is John Maynard's short yet determined response when asked by the captain:

> "Could you hold on five minutes longer?"
> "I'll try, sir." [lines 146-148]

In ***The Last of the Mohicans***, we read:

> "My child!" said Munro, speaking quick and wildly; "give me my child!"

"Uncas will try," was *the short and touching answer* [my emphasis].

The simple, but meaning assurance [again, my emphasis] was lost on the father, who seized the piece of gauze, and crushed it in his hand, while his eyes roamed fearfully among the bushes, as if he equally dreaded and hoped for the secrets they might reveal. (***The Last of the Mohicans***, Cooper Edition/**SUNY,** Ch. 18, pp. **184-185**; ***Leatherstocking Tales***, The Library of America**,** vol. I, pp. **682-683**; Feb. 1826)

Turning to Balzac's ***Christ in Flanders***, we read:

"A beggar woman, old, wrinkled, and clad in rags, was crouching, with her almost empty wallet, on a great coil of rope that lay in the prow. One of the rowers, an old sailor, who had known her in the days of her beauty and prosperity, had let her come in 'for the love of God,' *in the beautiful phrase the common people use*" [My emphasis]. (p. 13)

In "***The Helmsman of Lake Erie***," we find the following description of old John Maynard:

"He was known from one end of Lake Erie to the other, by the name of honest John Maynard; and the secret of his honesty to his neighbors, was his love of God." [lines 57-61]

"*The beautiful phrase the common people use*" and the explanation why the old helmsman was willing to sacrifice his life for his fellow man have a common denominator in "*his love of God*:"

"It is one thing to be a deacon, and another to be devoted to the love of God, and to that love of our species which we are told is the consequence of a love of the Deity. (James Fenimore Cooper, ***The Sea Lions,*** Ch. II, p. **28**/532, April 1849)

The possibility of Balzac's ***Christ in Flanders*** not only influencing ***The Headsman***, but also ***"The Helmsman,"*** deserves, at the very least, serious consideration.

XIV.

THEODOR FONTANE'S BALLAD OF "THE WINKELRIED BEES"

It may strike the reader as nothing less than amazing that Theodor Fontane, in the year 1849, had nothing better to do than to lambast the legend of Arnold von Winkelried. He excuses himself in the epigraph, allowing himself "*the fool's privilege*." It will be remembered that his famous ballad of "***John Maynard***" **[21]** was first published in 1886, almost four decades later. A translation of the epigraph and the first stanza [my translation] may serve to convey the flippant tone of the 1849 ballad:

The Winkelried Bees (1849) **[22]**

Let's not brood
Over what it may invoke;
Whether polite or rude –
The fool's privilege is the joke.

The wasps and the bees
Have moved to the battleground:
Guelph and Staufer dynasties,
Their battle cries resound.
About their linden sweet
As if it were their last abode
The worker bees will not retreat
But fight for every twig and node.

As this paper contends that the Winkelried legend has much in common with the Maynard legend, how is it possible for one of the ballads to receive a verbal bashing while the other might piously be recited during a church service? This author would suggest that Fontane could not have composed a jocular Winkelried ballad in 1886, for the simple reason that the times had changed radically, and so had Fontane's own estimation of where society was heading. In 1849, Fontane was still very much "at home" in the lap of a regimented Prussia; in 1886, he saw the "old order" crumbling and the beginnings of a "new nobility" in Germany – not ancestral nobility or the established social order of old, but a society in which "the little man," the working man – the "*worker bees*" – could no longer be taken as a joke. Thus Fontane, also a keen social observer, had matured and could sense that a new kind of hero was needed to inspire the masses – interestingly, just as Fontane became enamored of Gottfried August Bürger's "***The Song of the Good Man***" **[23]**, his interest became ever more directed towards a literary antecedent which could display the heroic qualities of the common man. These shared attributes are to be found in both the legend of John Maynard and its much earlier antecedent, Arnold von Winkelried.

XV.

Is there a "Maynard" in The Headsman?

Cooper's novels abound with John Maynards. They are old but tough; they speak their minds but are honest; and they are deeply religious. They act almost instinctively – talk and lengthy deliberation is not part of their makeup. They are resolute and prepared to sacrifice their lives for what they believe is right.

The John Maynard of ***The Headsman*** is not the brave but headstrong helmsman Maso, who – perhaps not altogether due to his own fault but that of society – has been left to fend for himself in less than honorable ways. In ***The Headsman***, the reader must turn to the old mountain guide, Pierre Dumont, who "*had already weathered so many tempests among the mountains*" [p. 369]. **[24]** He, like John Maynard, when confronted by the panicking women passengers [cf. "***The Helmsman***," lines 93-110], can also give direct orders in a language understood by all:

> …"but quicken your pace; until you are better acquainted with the country in which you journey, your words pass for empty breath in my ears. This is no trifle of a cloak

> doubled about the person, or of balls rolled into piles by the sport of children, but an affair of life and death. You are half a league in the air, Signor Genoese, in the region of storms, where the winds work their will, at times, as if infernal devils were rioting to cool themselves, and where the stoutest limbs and the firmest hearts are brought but too often to see and confess their feebleness!" - Ch. XXII, p. 369

As conditions worsen, Pierre can only say:

> "Signore, we are in the hands of God." – Ch. XXII, p. 374

When Sigismund offers to accompany Pierre in search of the trail, Pierre is at first offended:

> "Thou hast not done me justice, young man," answered Pierre, with severe reproach in his manner. "Had I been base enough to desert your trust, these limbs and this strength are yet sufficient to carry me safely down the mountain; but though a guide of the Alps may freeze like another man, the last throb of his heart will be in behalf of those he serves!" – Ch. XXIII, p. 381

Pierre's sense of duty coupled with regret that he might never again see his loved ones, finds expression in his desperate plea to God in the following passage:

> "The heart of Pierre began to chill with the decreasing warmth of his body **[25]**, and the firm old man, overwhelmed with his responsibility while his truant thoughts would unbidden recur to those whom he had left in his cottage at the foot of the mountain, gave way at last to his emotions in a paroxysm of grief, wringing his hands, weeping and calling loudly on God for succor." - Ch. XXIII, p. 390

The prayers of Pierre and the travelers are answered when old Uberto, the "*noble and half-reasoning brute*" of St. Bernard [p. 386] comes to their aid and helps the party to find the trail buried in the snow, which leads them to a shelter called the Refuge. Pierre's comment:

> "Enter and thank God!" he said. "Another hopeless half-hour would have brought down from his pride the stoutest among us – enter, and thank God!" - Ch. XXIII, p. 390

The importance of prayer, even following the rescue, is seen when Christine, Balthazar's disgraced daughter, and Adelheid, Baron de Willading's ailing daughter, give silent thanks to God:

> "Adelheid pressed the hand of Christine, and they knelt together, bowing their heads to a rock. As fervent, pure, and sincere orisons ascended to God, from these pious and innocent spirits, as it belongs to mortality to offer." - Ch. XXIV, p. 393

XVI.

A Structural Difficulty in *The Headsman*

The major problem this reader has encountered in the novel has not so much concerned Maso or Sigismund, but rather the office of the Executioner of Berne. As far as this reviewer can tell, no one has ever challenged Cooper regarding his claim that the Executioner of Berne involved a *hereditary* office. Yet viewed from an historical perspective, the Headsman, it would seem,

simply had no choice in the matter, not because of unjust laws but because he and his children were not allowed, due to the prevailing social sentiment, to engage in other occupations:

> "The impact of social ostracism penetrated every aspect and even the tiniest facets of the life of the Headsman. In a society rigidly built upon social estates, he was an outcast. The bylaws of the guilds of respectable municipal craftsmen forbade every "infamous" applicant access to their professions. A change of occupation was thus to all intents and purposes ruled out. The few exceptions, made possible only by the authorities through complicated pardons and "testimonies of honesty," only tended to confirm the rule. The executioner, together with his whole family, was a prisoner of his profession and his despised social position.
>
> "A hangman's son had very few options available. Often he spent his time of apprenticeship as an executioner's assistant in another town, achieved promotion as a journeyman, until he had received his "master's diploma," a successful decapitation. If he was not yet of age, it was possible to "reserve the office," until he was able to assume the duties of his retiring father. Should he attempt to avoid becoming an executioner and consider becoming a knacker instead, this would entail a professional demotion. The daughters of an executioner, like other young ladies of their day and age, were obliged to remain in their parental home until marriage. The prospects of finding a suitable husband were, however, limited, just as were those of an unmarried executioner of finding a suitable match among other executioners' daughters and widows in his own country. Yet, in general, the search was successful; the clan-like, and often "inter-cantonal" and international "dynasties of headsmen" of related families are proof of this." - **Peter Sommer, *Scharfrichter von Bern*** (Berne, Switzerland: Lukianos-Verlag Hans Erpf, 1969), pp. 18-19. [- *My translation from the German*] **[26]**

Even in ***The Headsman***, Balthazar himself was only able to find his own wife, Marguerite, not in Berne, but in Neufchâtel, the only daughter of another headsman:

> "Neufchâtel, and other countries besides Berne, have their privileged! My mother was the only child of the headsman of the first."
>
> - ***The Headsman***, Ch. XI, p. 203

It should also be pointed out that the executioner's house was directly beside the municipal brothel, which would seem to have supplemented his income [***ibid***., "Das Haus des Henkers," pp. 14-15]. Cooper does not mention the various forms of execution practiced in Berne ("*the gallows, water and fire, the wheel and the sword*" [***ibid***., "Hinrichtungsarten," p. 31]) or the deft use of torture by the executioner to extract confessions. Nor is the significant anatomical knowledge of the executioner emphasized, although he sometimes served as a physician or a veterinarian.

Susan Fenimore Cooper, in her ***Pages and Pictures***, makes the following statement in her "Notes" on ***The Headsman***:

> "The chief incident of the plot was taken from one of those oppressive laws of feudal times, which, from their inherent injustice, he held in abhorrence; in the canton of Berne, before the changes of the last century, the odious office of executioner, or headsman, was rendered obligatory upon one family, to be inherited, like a curse — not natural, but arbitrary — not for three or four generations only, but so long as that family should exist. Upon this fact the whole plot of the Swiss tale turns;…."

- p. 314, cf. **Annotation # 10**

As there would seem to be no middle ground between Cooper's and Sommer's presentation, the fundamental structure underlying ***The Headsman***'s plot is, at least in part, seriously flawed. Also, the depiction of the "meek-mannered" Balthazar hardly seems in keeping with the actual duties of the Headsman of Berne. That the Headsman's son should have even been considered as a suitable partner either by Adelheid or by her father, Baron Melchior de Willading, of Berne (of all places!), is unthinkable. Sigismund, too, understands the dilemma in the following dialogue:

> [**Adelheid**:] "As for me, placed in the scale against thy merits, they have never weighed at all. If thou canst not become noble in order that we may be equals, I shall find more happiness in descending to thy level, than by living in heartless misery at the vain height where I have been placed by accident."
>
> [**Sigismund**:] "Blessed, ingenuous girl! – But what does it all avail? Our marriage is impossible." - ***The Headsman***, Ch. X, pp. 190-191

When Jacques Colis, Christine's financé, refuses to go through with the marriage during the Fête des Vignerons because Christine's identity was revealed by "the cunning Pippo," the buffoon, a question is put to him which he answers honestly:

> "No doubt the respectability of the parent is the next thing to a good dowry, in the choice of a wife," returned the bailiff, "but one of thy years has not come hither, without having first inquired into the parentage of her thou wert about to wed?"
>
> "It was sworn to me that the secret should be kept. The girl is well endowed, and a promise was solemnly made that her parentage should never be known. The family Colis is esteemed in Vaud, and I would not have it said that the blood of the headsman of the canton hath mixed in a stream as fair as ours."
>
> - ***The Headsman***, Ch. XVIII, p. 306

How can Cooper talk of "hereditary privilege" in such a family as Christine's if no one but other headsman families can bear to consider marital ties?

One possible explanation for Cooper identifying the Office of the Executioner with "hereditary rights" is the mistaken belief that the Executioner must be a member of the *Bürgerschaft* of Berne, citizens of an aristocratic order enjoying [as Cooper would put it, "unmerited"] hereditary privileges. Yet is it possible that those very citizens, whose status Balthazar supposedly shared, would shun one of their own and view him and his family as outcasts? Certainly at one point, it does sound as if the *Bürgerschaft* is meant:

> "How! Dost question the doctrine of descents? We shall next hear thee dispute the rights of the bürgerschaft!" - ***The Headsman***, Ch. XVIII, p. 311

A second possibility is that the children of a headsman generally had no choice but intermarriage within other headsman families with the consequent creation of "*dynasties of headsmen*" [Sommer: "Scharfrichterdynastien"], which, of course, were anything but "noble" or "hereditary," but cruelly self-sustaining due to the bigotry of social compulsion.

Sommer even points out that executioners were relieved of their offices for – shall we say? – "forgivable" infractions or misdemeanors:

> "Berne dismissed those serving as Headsmen more than once. For example, Abraham Hotz, who 'was negligent in fulfilling his duty but too diligent in filling his cup full of wine.'" - **Peter Sommer, *Scharfrichter von Bern***, p. 19. [- *My translation*]

It is most unlikely that a man who enjoys his office as a hereditary right could be relieved of that office, simply because he liked to imbibe. The Executioner may more properly be viewed as a man *devoid of* hereditary privileges in the employ of Berne, who, if the authorities so deem, may be dismissed at their pleasure. **[27]**

XVII.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Battle of Sempach may indeed be regarded as a watershed event in the history of the Swiss struggle for independence and nationhood. The victory is singular in that it proclaims the dream of a New World Order centuries before the dream was finally realized. The *unauthenticated* legend of Arnold von Winkelried, which was probably a product of the 16th rather than the 14th century, was not the tale of a king or nobleman, but of a freeman prepared to die for his beliefs and principles. Cooper, who clearly sees the overriding significance of the Winkelried legend, provides its ultimate justification:

> "There are certain great events embalmed in history that it will not do to question, and which, even when false, it is unwise to disturb, as they are so many incentives to noble deeds." ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland*** (Cooper Edition/SUNY), Letter XIII, p. 121.

The message behind the legend – "*to open up a pathway to liberty*" – is inclusive rather than exclusive. For that "*pathway*" must be tread by those who come afterwards, and they must be prepared to stand as heroically as the legendary Arnold so that others may come after them. Both the battle and the succeeding legend must serve as the bulwarks of republican commitment, whether Swiss or American. Swiss soil, in this sense, cannot be foreign soil but *republican* soil.

For a Jacksonian Democrat such as Cooper, the Swiss legend dovetails with American beliefs and principles. Whether an Arnold von Winkelried or an Andrew Jackson **[28]**, the legends that they represent do not stand in conflict. They only offer testimony to the universal conviction that we are all inherently equal, that justice must be blind, that each of us should be entitled to that modicum of dignity which prohibits social ostracism while preserving the right to strive for personal happiness, that unmerited privilege is a crime against all that is right and, in the final analysis, that the God in all of our hearts will point the way to the most perfect form of societies, and – can there be any doubt? – in which the people's legitimate interests and rights are not violated.

The willingness to lay down one's life for others, whether it be for the passengers and crew of the *Jersey*, or comrades in the field in the Battle of Sempach, or for something far greater, whether termed "love of God" or "love of country," must still be regarded, even in our day and age when values often seem empty, as the noblest and most heroic act a human being can rise to.

That Cooper transposes the legend of Winkelried from Sempach to Lac Leman, that Winkelried, so to speak, becomes the figure head of the "flagship of the novel," embodying an idealization of the flowering of a republic and all the virtues for which it stands, is a clear-cut manipulation of a Swiss legend by America's own greatest legend builder.

The "missing element," the Swiss casualties, in "***The Helmsman of Lake Erie***" is veiled, a favorite technique in Cooper's works. What higher literary tribute to the unfortunate Swiss immigrants on the *Erie*, who had set out "*for a home in the West, where liberty might be enjoyed and a kindred atmosphere breathed*" [– ***Kalamazoo Gazette***, August 20, 1841], than the creation of a legend based, at least in part, upon their own national hero, Arnold von Winkelried?

The archaic language of ***The Headsman*** notwithstanding, the parallels in motifs abound. It requires no great leap of the imagination to picture Cooper over a decade later sawing off silver-tongued flourishes to add momentum to a much simpler and, consequently, fast-moving text, though loaded with much the same material, for general newspaper consumption. A chameleon of style, Cooper was capable of a kaleidoscope of flourishes – an inconsistency often due to the banal fact that he was either pressed for time, or, viewed perhaps more charitably, his interests and his life combined so many intellectual and aesthetic facets that he was simply too active to waste time in undue editing.

Yet there is another aspect to the good ship *Winkelried* that should not be ignored. When little eight-year-old Paul was given his toy vessel made by his father and the old boatman Jean Descloux, there was the question of *the significance of a name* for the little ship. Of Swiss national heroes, only Guillaume Tell was mentioned. Cooper opted for Arnold von Winkelried in his novel because he felt that the legend stood on firmer ground than Tell and because the steamer he rode on was actually named the *Winkelried*.

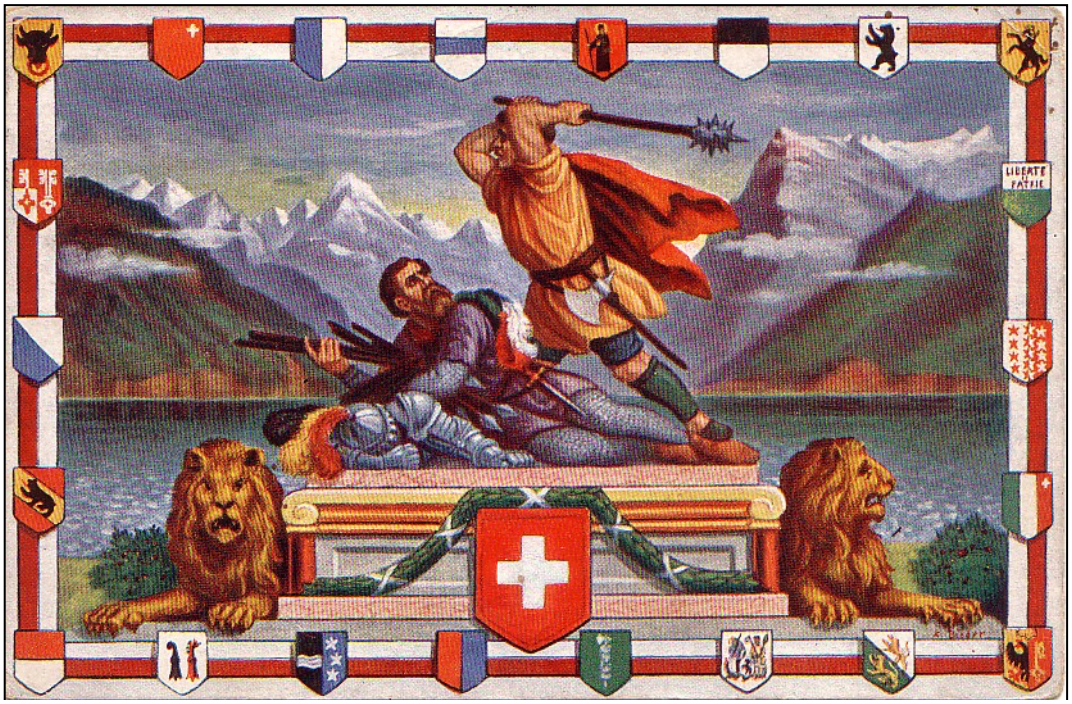
But Paul was not simply interested in a name. In his mother's letter to her sister, we read:

> "He thinks too if he could but find, some little men, about as big as his thumb to navigate it, he would be very happy."
>
> ***Mrs. Cooper's letter of September 10, 1832***, from Vévey to her sister Martha De Lancey (Cf. pp. 13-14 of this essay)

Paul's "*little men, about as big as his thumb*," and Fontane's "*worker-bees*"— an equation for a New World in which the common man has come into his own.

Then there is, on the one hand, the depiction of the tempest, in which an observant reader might ask if the Niagara herself [cf. **Annotation #14**] had not been transferred to little Switzerland and metamorphosed into violent cascading masses of Alpine air to create a cauldron of doom for the valiant *Winkelried*; whereas, on the other hand, we can consider Cooper's own matter-of-fact observation regarding the lake:

> "The Leman has been in a foam, but its miniature anger, though terrible enough at times, to those who are embarked on its waters, can never rise to the dignity of a surf and a rolling sea."
>
> ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine*** (Cooper Edition/SUNY) , Letter XX, p. 194. (Cf. p. 13 of this essay)



Postcard (author's collection) depicting the dying Winkelried - posted from Sion to Holland in 1917. A dead Habsburg knight lies under a dying Winkelried, impaled by the Austrian pikes he enfolded in his arms so that his own men (a Swiss comrade wielding a morningstar is depicted) can breach the Austrian lines. The actual monument is located in Stans (canton of Nidwalden).

Cooper's poetic imagination sensed the challenge and felt the inspiration of creating giants out of that which was "*miniature*" and "*little*."**[29]** These images, together with James and Susan and old Jean the boatman out on the lake with the children, and an unnamed toy boat being tested for its seaworthiness and a happy boy whose imagination could run as wild as his father's, could be evoked within the framework of little Paul's "*gazette* — [to be] *written every day, to record the events that might happen to his Vessel – not for the whole town, he said but to be read to the family, at the tea table*." Perhaps, in the confines of such an intimate family setting, the true and ultimate European roots behind the legend of John Maynard sparked the imaginations of both father and son.

NORMAN BARRY,
BAD SCHUSSENRIED, GERMANY
SEPTEMBER 2010, UPDATED JANUARY 2021

The Swiss nation flag with "Winkelried," "Sempach," and the year "1386" adorning the window of a house in the remote German-speaking mountain village of Bosco Gurin in the canton of Tecino close to the Italian border. Photographed by Monika Kaiser in May 2010!

ANNOTATIONS:

For the original text of "***The Helmsman of Lake Erie***" in ***The Church of England Magazine*** (London, England), June 7, 1845, cf. https://johnmaynard.net/CofE.pdf

1) Cf. **James Fenimore Cooper**, ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland*** (Albany: State University of New York, 1980), Historical Introduction by **Robert E. Spiller and James F. Beard**, p.xix:

> "***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland***, published in Philadelphia on 20 May 1836 with the title ***Sketches of Switzerland [Part One]***, was the first of five epistolary travel narratives completed by James Fenimore Cooper between 1836 and 1838. Though their primary motive was not autobiography, these books furnished a selectively autobiographical account of his experience of France, England, Switzerland, Italy, the Low Countries and the Rhine from his landing at Cowes, Isle of Wight, on 2 July 1826 to his re-embarkation from London on 28 September 1833."

2) The five Cooper editions of ***Gleanings in Europe***, put out by the State University of New York with James Franklin Beard, Editor-in-Chief, are listed below. Cooper's second visit to Switzerland is in ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine***.

> a) ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland*** [cf. **Annotation #1**], originally entitled ***Sketches of Switzerland*** in the United States and ***Excursions in Switzerland*** in Britain.
> b) ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine*** (Albany: State University of New York, 1986), originally entitled ***Sketches of Switzerland, Part Second*** in the 1836 American edition, and ***A Residence in France; with an Excursion up the Rhine, and a Second Visit to Switzerland*** in the British First Edition.
> c) ***Gleanings in Europe: France*** (Albany: State University of New York, 1983), originally published in 1837.
> d) ***Gleanings in Europe: England*** (Albany: State University of New York, 1982), originally published in 1837.
> e) ***Gleanings in Europe: Italy*** (Albany: State University of New York, 1981), originally published in 1838.

3) Cf. **Professor Edwards A. Park, D.D.,** ***Distinctive Traits of John B. Gough*** in ***The New England Magazine and Bay State Monthly***, Vol. V, No. 1, Whole No. 25 (November 1886), pp. 3-7: ("***Making of America***") http://digital.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=newe&cc=newe&idno=newe0005-1&node=newe0005-1%3A1&frm=frameset&view=image&seq=15

4) In ***The Headsman***, initial superstitious fears among the passengers had dissipated and even Maso, who felt that all should be aware that a storm was brewing, was proved mistaken:

> "Another idle and general laugh from the forecastle came to contradict this opinion of Maso's, and to prove how easy it is for the ignorant to exist in security, even on the brink of destruction." ***The Headsman***, Ch. VI, p. 105.

In "***The Helmsman***," passengers are too entranced by the beauty of the day to believe that tragedy is only hours away. In both works, the reader is fully informed in advance, allowing dramatic irony to heighten suspense.

5) On the other hand, the "final word" has yet to be pronounced. Cf. **Dr. Hans Rudolf Fuhrer**'s excellent article, "***Arnold Winkelried – der Held von Sempach 1386***" in ***PALLASCH, Zeitschrift für Miltärgeschichte*** [= *The Magazine for Military History*, published in Salzburg**,** Austria] **(**Organ der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Mlitärgeschichte), No. 23, Autumn 2006, p. 71.

6) Cf. ***The Weekly Herald***, New York, August 21st, 1841, (Vol. V, No. 48), p. 396, statistics at bottom of column 3:

> THE LOST. —The following is [sic] an accurate account of the number of persons on board the steamboat *Erie* when burned, as can be procured. We never wish to exaggerate numbers, but we used a great deal of exertion to procure the following list, which we are confident will be found to be correct.

Swiss passengers		130
Cabin	"	50
Deck	" Americans, &c.	50
Crew		25
Musicians		10
		265
Saved		33
Total Loss		232

7) Cooper's use of Byron's comical expression "*Tousy-mousy*" to describe his elated feelings upon seeing Lake Leman deserves quoting:

> Tuesday, 4 September [1832]
> Left Payerne in good season and reached Moudon to breakfast, after which we drove on to Vevay. We reached the summit of the mountains that bound the lake about three, in a glorious afternoon, and enjoyed as fine a view as possible of the scenery. We were filled with what Byron calls Tousy-mousy, and more than ever desirous of spending some time on this enchanting lake.
>
> ***The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper***, Vol. II, p. 327, ***Journal* XVIII**, 2 September to 5 September 1832

8) ***Encyclopædia Britannica***: "**nullification**, in American history, doctrine upholding the right of a state to declare null and void within its boundaries an act of the federal government."

9) Cf. **Dorothy Waples**, ***The Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper*** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), p. 17:

> "In 1832, little Paul Cooper, playing in the lakes of Switzerland with his toy boat that his father had made for him, was troubled whether to name his craft General Jackson, the Constitution, or Guillaume [=William] Tell. His father must have done more to create the boy's quandary than to help him out of it, for James Fenimore Cooper was himself committed to all three, and a choice would have gone hard with him."
>
> Footnote 38 on that page: Mrs. Cooper to her sister, Martha De Lancey, Vevay [sic], Switzerland, September 11, 1832.

10) Explanatory Note 195.22 (p. 275), in ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine***, states:

> "Cooper's encounter with a fantastical steamboat captain in 1828 had been aboard the *Leman*, not the *Winkelried*; see ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland***, p. 249."

The passage in ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland***, describing Cooper's first visit to Switzerland four years earlier, reads:

> "It was near evening before the *Leman* returned and permitted us to embark, when, for the first time, I put foot on its blue waters. We were soon under way for Geneva, with a company of some forty or fifty passengers, chiefly English. Before the night set in

we reached a point, where the isolated and magnificent pile of Mont Blanc became visible." [p. 248, not 249].

A mistake on Cooper's behalf cannot be made out as both a *Leman* and a *Winkelried* steamer were in operation.

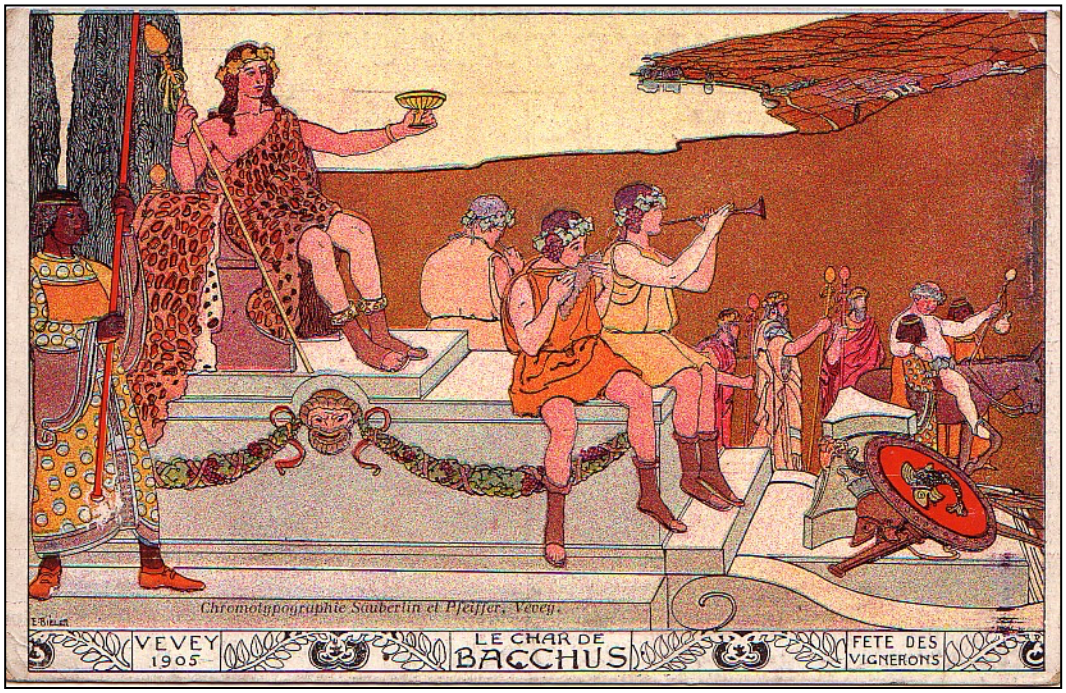
11) Cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personenschifffahrt_auf_dem_Genfersee#Geschichte and http://www.simplonpc.co.uk/CGN1.html#anchor577591

12) Although "Abbaye des Vignerons" might seem to be the "abbey of the wine-growers," this is definitely not Cooper's intention. "Festivals" or "festivities" is the only possible reading:

> "The festivals of Bacchus are supposed to have been models of those long-continued festivities, which are still known in Switzerland by the name of the Abbaye des Vignerons." ***The Headsman***, 1st paragraph of Ch. XIII, p. 222.

The writer of "***American Poetry***," in ***The Edinburgh Review***, lxi (April 1835), 23-24, for instance, even mistakenly referred to Cooper's ***The Headsman*** as ***The Abbot***, supposedly confusing Cooper's novel with Scott's! One wonders if the reviewer ever even held a copy of ***The Headsman*** in his hand! - Cf. ***Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage***, edited by **George Dekker and John P. McWilliams** (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 176.

For an explanation of the actual meaning of "Abbaye des Vignerons," cf. **William Beattie**, M.D., ***Switzerland. Illustrated in a Series of Views Taken Expressly for This Work*** by **W. H. Bartlett** , Esq., Vol. II (London: George Virtue, 1838), pp. 148-149:



"*The Bacchus Float*:" *Official postcard of the Fête des Vignerons, Vévey* (4, 5, 7, 8, 10 & 11 August 1905) – *Author's Collection*.

"At Vevay exists the well-known society entitled the Abbaye des Vignerons, which, from the remotest times, has superintended the labours of the vineyard, with the motto—*Ora et labora* [*pray and labor*]. The most active and experienced of its members are selected every spring to make a general survey of the vineyards belonging to the commune—to report the condition of each—when the society distributes a variety of premiums in the shape of medals, *serpes d'honneur*, or pruning instruments, to all the vine-dressers who have set the best example in the management of the grape. Previously to the Revolution, these prizes were distributed with great pomp at a curious fête got up for the occasion ["Fête des Vignerons"], and which was repeated every five or six years."

The wine-growers' festival in July 2019 —The next festival will take place, not in five or six years but in roughly twenty years! The historic fête Cooper wove into his novel is now on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Aurel Schmidt, in his recent book ***Leather-stocking in Switzerland: James Fenimore Cooper and the Idea of Democracy in Europe and America*** [my translation], provides the following pertinent information:

"The last wine-growers' festival before Cooper's stay in Vévey took place in 1819; the first time afterwards was in the year 1833. Consequently, Cooper's acquaintance with the fête must have been through word-of-mouth portrayals."

Aurel Schmidt, ***Lederstrumpf in der Schweiz: James Fenimore Cooper und die Idee der Demokratie in Europa und Amerika*** (Frauenfeld, Switzerland; Stuttgart, Germany; Vienna, Austria: Verlag Huber, 2002), p. 212, ftn. 7

For a description of the 1819 festival, which no doubt served as the model of Cooper's own depiction, cf. **William Beattie**, M.D., ***Switzerland. Illustrated in a Series of Views Taken Expressly for This Work*** by **W. H. Bartlett**, Esq., p. 149:

"…After an interruption of twenty-two years, caused by political events, and a series of bad seasons for the winegrowers, this fête was resumed on the fifth of August, 1819, in all its ancient pomp and ceremony. On this occasion, the village of Vevay was suddenly increased by an influx of more than sixteen thousand spectators from all parts of the Confederacy, and of whom no inconsiderable number was English. The fête presented a most grotesque, but interesting motley of heathen ceremony, scriptural

scenes from the Old Testament, mixed up with customs still observed in the canton; the whole accompanied with processions, dances, songs, banquets, and dramatic exhibitions, in which were upwards of seven hundred performers in appropriate and generally very elegant costumes, according to the part assigned to them.

"The ceremonies commenced with that of crowning the twelve most successful cultivators of the vine; after which, a magnificent procession defiled past, consisting of Ceres, Pomona, Bacchus, &c., all most sumptuously and classically attired, borne in elegant cars by their appropriate attendants, priests, bacchanals, &c., followed by gardeners, vine-dressers, reapers, haymakers, ploughmen, and herdsmen, in perfect costume—each set bearing the implements of their labour, of which they gave pantomimic representations, mingled with national songs and dances. The ground was kept by a hundred fine looking men, dressed and accoutered *à la Henri Quatre*, in the becoming style of the *Cent Suisses*. Little girls, fancifully dressed, danced like fairies before several goddesses: milkmen from the mountains, leading their cows, sang the Ranz-des-Vaches, while the pleased animals licked the hands that led them during the well-known sound. But the most grotesque feature of the scene, was old father Noah, with his family, in a vine-clad cottage, drawn, as were also a forge and a wine press, by four horses richly caparisoned. The whole closed with a village wedding, in which the dresses preserved faithfully the ancient Swiss costume, while a baron and baroness, in the most exaggerated dress of the last century, walked a minuet to grace their vassals' nuptials, in a style of admirable burlesque. All the songs composed for the occasion were, of course, in praise of agriculture and its concomitants—peace and liberty; and the concourse of free and happy peasantry assembled on the occasion afforded the most appropriate illustration to their patriotic effusions."

Susan Fenimore Cooper (1813-1894), the eldest daughter, provided notes on her father's various novels, including ***The Headsman***. Her description of the *Abbeye des Vignerons*:

"Gleaning, as all reading travelers do, many lesser historical details, which give something of a peculiar coloring to the annals of every town on old Europe's soil, Mr. Cooper's fancy was pleased with the account of a holiday festival, celebrated at Vévey in past ages, and still kept up, at intervals, by the good people of the borough. This is called the *Abbeye des Vignerons* – the great holiday of the vine-dressers – a gay and motley scene, partaking largely of the carnival spirit; blended, however, with something of the better feeling of the harvest-home. . . .

"The concluding scene of the procession was always a rustic wedding; the bride being dowered – as was usual at many a great festival of olden time – by the lord and lady of the manor: the wedding train, bride and groom, parents and friends, lord and lady, the wedding-gifts, the wardrobe and household gear – aye, the very broom and spindle, with a mimic cottage, all figuring in the long and quaint array."

- **Susan Fenimore Cooper,** ***Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper, with Notes*** (Secaucus, N. J. 07094: Castle Books, 1980 – Reprinted from the original 1865 edition), pp. 313-314.

In other words, the Fête des Vignerons was integrated into the plot of ***The Headsman***; ***or, The Abbaye des Vignerons*** by using the event as a means of exposing the identity of Balthazar's daughter at the crowning moment of the "revelries."

13) Cf. ***Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage***, edited by **George Dekker and John P. McWilliams** (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 18: Quoted from the ***New-England Magazine***, vi (January 1834), 88-9.

14) Memories of "the Falls" dominate much of Cooper's writing. The use of "cataract," when referring to Niagara, crops up frequently over a span of nearly three decades:

a) It was thirty-three years after the interview which we have just related that an American army was once more arrayed against the troops of England; but the scene was transferred from Hudson's banks to those of the Niagara.
….In no one were these virtuous hopes more vivid than in the bosom of a young officer who stood on the table rock, contemplating ***the great cataract***, on the evening of the 25th of July of that bloody year.
The Spy – The Michigan Historical Reprint Series, Ch. XXXV, p. 542, **1821**

b) About the time this letter was written, Miss Emmerson made both of her nieces acquainted with the promised project that was to give them the agreeable surprise: — she had long contemplated going to see "the Falls," and she now intended putting her plan into execution. Katherine was herself pressed to make one of the party, but the young lady, at the same time she owned her wish to see ***this far-famed cataract***, declined the offer firmly, but gratefully…
[Writing under the pseudonym of "**Jane Morgan**"], ***Tales for Fifteen*** – Dodo Press Ch. IV, p. 36, **1823**

c) We will not trace him [=Benjamin Penguillan, nicknamed Ben Pump] in his brief wanderings, under the influence of that spirit of emigration that sometimes induces a dapper Cockney to quit his home, and lands him, before the sound of Bow-bells is out of his ears, within ***the roar of the cataract of Niagara***.
The Pioneers – Cooper edition, Ch. V, p. 61, **1823**

d) Thence we descended the Alleghany river to the Ohio, made a wide circuit in the state of the same name, and returned, by way of Lake Erie, to Buffalo (in New-York), which is a thriving fresh-water lake-port. We spent, of course, a few days examining ***the mighty cataract of Niagara***, and in visiting the shores of Lake Ontario.
The Travelling Bachelor; or, Notions of the Americans,
The Travelling Bachelor; or, Notions of the Americans – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Letter XIV, p. 207, **1828**

e) …Leaving this functionary to follow with the carriage, we walked along the banks of the river, by a common place and dirty road, among forges and mills, to ***the cataract of the Rhine***. What accessories to a cataract! How long will it be before the imagination of a people who are so fast getting to measure all greatness, whether in nature or in art, by the yard stick, will think of those embellishments for ***Niagara***?
Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine – Cooper Edition/SUNY, **"Letter XV, Second Visit to Switzerland,"** pp. 146-147, **1836**

f) "My sudden appearance here, however, will be without mystery, when I tell you that I returned from England, by the way of Quebec, the Great lakes, and the Falls, having been induced by my friend Ducie to take that route, in consequence of his ship's being sent to the St. Lawrence. A desire for novelty, and ***particularly a desire to see the celebrated cataract, which is almost the lion of America***, did the rest."
Home as Found, Ch. IX, 180/591, **1838**

g) "Eau-douce, we shall have to carry the Sergeant's brother over Niagara yet, to show him what is done in a frontier."

"The devil! Master Pathfinder, you must be joking now! Surely it is not possible for a bark canoe to go over ***that mighty cataract***?"

The Pathfinder – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Ch. III, pp. 42-43, **1840**

h) I remember to have heard a traveler who had been as far as Niagara, declare that his black did nothing but roar with laughter, the first half-hour he stood confronted with ***that mighty cataract***. ***Satanstoe*** – Cooper Edition/SUNY, Ch. XIV, pp. 206-207, **1845**

> ☞There lay the Leman, broad, blue and tranquil; with its surface dotted by sails, or shadowed by grand mountains; its shores varying from the impending precipice, to the sloping and verdant lawn; the solemn, mysterious and glen-like valley of the Rhone; the castles, towns, villages, hamlets and towers, with all the smiling acclivities loaded with vines, villas and churches; the remoter pastures, out of which the brown *chalets* rose like subdued *bas reliefs*, and the back-ground of *Dents*, peaks and *glaciers*. Taking it all together, it is one of the most ravishing views on earth that is only too lovely for its evil-minded tenants; a world that bears about it, in every lineament, the impression of its divine Creator!
>
> One of our friends used to tell an anecdote of the black servant of a visitor at Niagara, who could express his delight, on seeing the falls, in no other way than by peals of laughter; and perhaps I ought to hesitate to confess it, but I actually imitated the Negro, as this glorious view broke suddenly upon me. Mine, however, was a laugh of triumph, for I instantly discovered that my feelings were not quite worn out, and that it was still possible to awaken enthusiasm within me, by the sight of an admirable nature.
>
> ***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine*** (Cooper Edition/SUNY) , Letter XVII, p. 168, **1836**

i) We know that the distance between ***the cataract of Niagara*** and the Massachusetts line is a large hundred leagues, and that it is as great between Sandy Hook and the 45th parallel of latitude.

The Redskins – Kessinger Reprint, Preface, p. xiv, **1846**

j) The reader may next wish to know why the wonderful events related in these volumes have so long been hidden from the world. In answer to this we would ask if anyone can tell how many thousands of years the waters have tumbled down the cliffs of Niagara, or why it was that civilized men heard of the existence of ***this wonderful cataract*** so lately as only three centuries since.

The Crater, Preface, p. 4/544, **1847**

k) We have heard of those who fancied that they beheld a signal instance of the hand of the Creator in ***the celebrated cataract of Niagara***.

Oak Openings, Ch. I, first sentence, p. **4**/582, **1848**

15) To ascertain just how often and where a particular motif may reoccur, cf. **Norman Barry**, "***A Language Comparison of the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper and 'The Helmsman of Lake Erie***.'" The "***Comparison***" is an ongoing project subject to regular updates: https://johnmaynard.net/COOPER.pdf

16) For a consideration of this motif in a religious context, cf. **Norman Barry**, ***"'The Helmsman of Lake Erie' in Light of the Role Played by Religion in the Fictional Writing of***

***James Fenimore Cooper or, the Secret Why the Good Man, When Dying, Does Not Groan*:"**
https://johnmaynard.net/MARTYRSDEATH.pdf

17) Cf. **Thomas R. Palfrey** [Northwestern University]: "***Cooper and Balzac***: '***The Headsman***,'" in ***Modern Philology*** (University of Chicago Press), vol. 29, no. 3 (Feb., 1932), pp. 335-341.

18) The English translation, **Honoré de Balzac**, ***Christ in Flanders***, does not specify the name of the translator. (Milton Keynes UK: Lightning Source UK Ltd, 28 September 2009: ISBN 1-4385-1123-X.

19) Cf. **James Fenimore Cooper**, ***"Point de Bateaux à Vapeur – Une Vision"*** (***Paris***, ***ou le Livre des Cents-et-Un***, Vol. IX, 1832, pp. 221-250. For online access to the satire transcribed in both French and English with an introductory comment and annotated text by **Hugh MacDougall**.
For online access to the English translation in ***The American Ladies' Magazine***, Volume VII, edited by **Mrs. S. J. Hale**, Published by **James B. Dow**, Boston, 1834, pp. 71- 79, cf.
Harvard University Library Page Delivery Service:
http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/2881687?n=27&s=4&imagesize=1200&jp2Res=.2 5&rotation=0

20) Although the assumption that Cooper could read literary works in French hardly requires proof, the situation is quite different when considering the German language. When in Marbach, "*the birth-place of Schiller*," Cooper could not resist saying a few words in praise of Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805):

> "Poor Schiller! In my eyes he is the German genius of the age. Goethe has got around him one of those factitious reputations that depend as much on gossip and tea drinking as on a high order of genius, and he is fortunate in being a *coddled celebrity* – for you must know there is a fashion in this thing, that is quite independent of merit—while Schiller's fame rests solely on its naked merits. My life for it, that it lasts the longest, and will burn brightest in the end. The schools, and a prevalent taste and the caprice of fashion can make Goethe in the dozens, at any time; but God only creates such men as Schiller. The Germans say, *we* [=Cooper's emphasis] cannot feel Goethe; but after all a translation is perhaps one of the best tests of genius, for though bad translations abound, if there is stuff in the original, it will find its way even into one of these." [***Gleanings in Europe: The Rhine***, Letter XIV, p. 140]

The final lines indicate that Cooper's proficiency in German was no match for his advanced proficiency in French. With regard to Schiller, it should not be forgotten that he, too, took a keen interest in the Swiss struggle for independence. ***Wilhelm Tell*** (1804) is, after two centuries, still one of his most popular and profound plays.

A Struth von Winkelried also figures in the play, and there is even a reference to his illustrious ancestor, the dragon killer! – **Friedrich Schiller, *Wilhelm Tell, Schauspiel*** (Stuttgart, Germany: Philipp Reclam jun., 2000: RECLAMS UNIVERSAL BIBLIOTHEK Nr. 12), p. 44: Act II, Scene 2, lines 1073-1078.

Although the name Arnold von Winkelried is not mentioned, there is also a passage obviously referring directly to Arnold von Winkelried heroic act in ***Ibid.,*** Act IV, Scene 2, lines 2444 – 2447.

Apart from the two Winkelried legends, there is another aspect of Schiller's Wilhelm Tell that is often overlooked: Tell was not merely a master of the crossbow but also *a master of the helm* ["*Ihr seid ein Meister Steuermann*" Act I, Scene 1, line 163]. Even Tell's way of thinking is sharply reminiscent of "The Helmsman of Lake Erie:" "The good man thinks of his own safety last of all – trust in God and save the endangered man." ["*Der brave Mann denkt an sich selbst zuletzt, Vertrau auf Gott und rette den Bedrängten*," Act. I, Scene 1, lines 139-140]

21) Cf. ***Theodor Fontane, Sämtliche Werke: Romane, Erzahlungen, Gedichte***, edited by **Walter Keitel**, Vol. VI, (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1964), pp. 287-289, "***John Maynard***."

22) Cf. ***Ibid***., pp. 290-292, "***Bienen-Winkelried***."

23) For my translation of Bürger's ballad "***Das Lied vom braven Mann***" (June 1776) into English, cf. https://johnmaynard.net/ManneEnglish.pdf
For a short essay on the ballad's significance, cf. **Norman Barry**, "***Gottfried August Bürger's 'The Song of the Good Man' as a Source of Inspiration in both Theodor Fontane's 'John Maynard' and 'The Tay Bridge***:'" Cf. https://johnmaynard.net/ManneEssay.pdf

24) It will be noticed that Cooper is just as at home with extreme cold as he is with extreme heat. In "***The Helmsman***," we read, "…*his blood seemed on fire with the great heat*" [lines 152-153].

25) During Cooper's first visit to Switzerland, Cooper, his old mountain guide and a horsekeeper were caught in a snowstorm and in danger of getting hopelessly lost. When Cooper, who was mounted, decided to "reconnoiter," his old mountain guide "*shouted out to me not to separate from him in a snow-storm, confessing that he was still uncertain as to the direction we ought to take*." Fortunately for all concerned, "*it stopped snowing suddenly*," and Cooper was able to locate their position when a mountain lake was sighted (cf. pp. 208-209, ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland***, Cooper Edition/SUNY).

A second incident, without a snowstorm, but even more frightening, deserves quoting:

> "There were two paths, when all our difficulties in the ascent were overcome. One, the safest but the longest, led over the rocky head of the Grimsel, while the other passed under its brow, *en corniche*. The latter leads along the verge of a precipice, where a false step might prove destruction. This spot was now covered with moist snow, to the depth of two feet, and it was not easy to find the path. I made a hasty computation, by which it was shown that if the snow yielded, or either of us slipped, he would fall about four hundred feet. It was blind work, and we had to feel our way with the pikes. This was the only spot, apart from glaciers, that I had seen in Switzerland, which struck me as being at all dangerous for those who travel on foot, and who use ordinary caution." ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland***, Letter XXI, p. 220.

The snowstorm and the difficulties of finding the trail (and staying on it) in ***The Headsman*** as well as the humorous reference to Peterchen's (the Bailiff of Vévey's) longing for a glass of *kirschwasser* [cf. ***The Heads***man – Michigan Historical Reprint Series, Ch. XXVI, p. 435 and p. 436] obviously hearken back to the year 1828. (For the old mountain guide's similar relish for *kirschwasser*, cf. ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland***, Letter XVI, p. 172; Letter XVIII, p. 190; and Letter XXII, p. 233.)

26) Apart from **Peter Sommer**'s 1969 book, ***Scharfrichter von Bern***, two other works have been consulted:

> a) **Danckert, Werner**, ***Unehrliche Leute*: *Die Verfemten Berufe***, (Berne and Munich: Francke Verlag, 1963, 2nd printing 1979).
>
> b) **Keller, Albrecht,** ***Henker/Blutvogt/Carnifex: Der Scharfrichter in der deutschen Kulturgeschichte***. Herausgegeben, bearbeitet und mit weiteren Fallbeispielen versehen von Michael Kirschschlager (Bonn and Leipzig: first printing 1921, reprinted in Leipzig by Verlag Kirschschlager, Arnstadt & Festa Verlag, 2007).

It is apparent in all three works that an executioner was never a member of nobility or endowed with hereditary rights, as described by Cooper. The stigmatization experienced by Balthazar of Berne in Cooper's novel was not limited to either Berne or Switzerland but was part and parcel of a much broader problem in German cultural history. That certain professions, trades, and even ethnic groups could be regarded as "infamous" and their members treated as outcasts was not limited to "executioners," i.e., hangmen. Hangmen, gravediggers, knackers, itinerant groups varying from shepherds to travelling actors, and even practitioners of "innocuous professions" (including bakers, weavers and potters) were ostracized. Jews and gypsies, as everyone knows, were also subjected to radical stigmatization.

27) The fascinating question as to where Cooper hit upon the idea of the Executioner as a hereditary office may possibly be answered in his ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland*** (Cooper Edition/State University of New York, 1980) when he rented the villa La Lorraine for three months in 1828 at a distance of only half a mile from Berne. An unlikely combination of "Swiss yeomanry" and *Bürgerschaft* may afford a hint:

> "A farm-house is attached to the property, which is in charge of a highly respectable man, who is a favourable specimen of the Swiss yeomanry, and from whom, I [=Cooper] am quite willing to confess, I have derived a fund of useful information on the subject of the usages and laws of his country. He is of the *Bürgerschaft*, and a captain of militia, besides being a moderate aristocrat." - Letter V, p. 34

La Lorraine was visited four years later, which included a touching reunion with the dogs, and particularly with old Turk, who still knew Cooper "after an absence of four years." Although the Walthers still owned the farm, Cooper wrote that they were soon planning to sell. - Cf. ***The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper***, vol. II, p. 321, Journal XVII, Saturday, September 1, 1832.

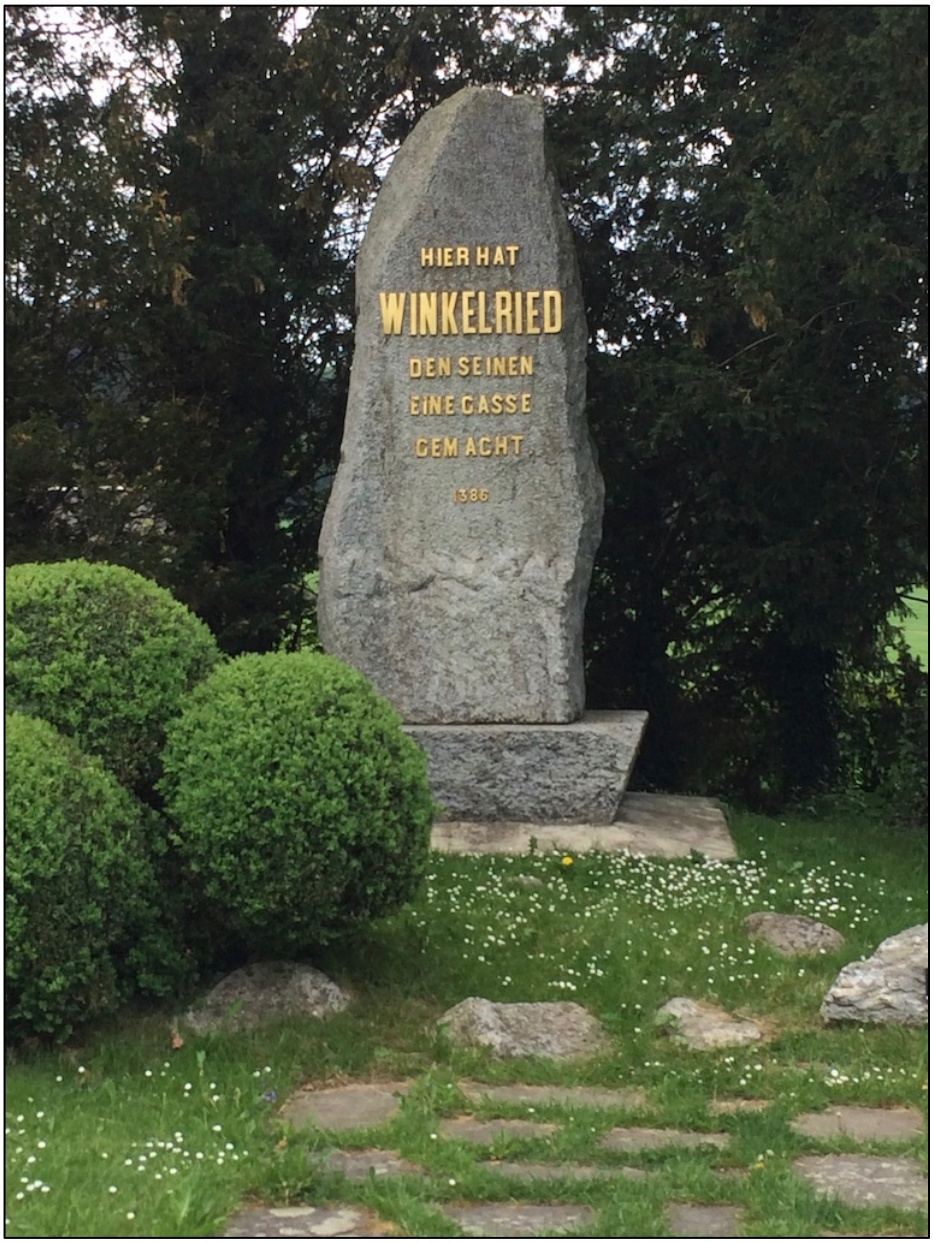
28) Cf. **Norman Barry,** "***The Legend of John Maynard, 'The Helmsman of Lake Erie,' in the Backdrop of the Year 1845: The Jackson – Elliott – Cooper Connection***," https://www.johnmaynard.net/MaynardJackson.pdf

29) The *miniature* as opposed to the *legendary* may even have been foreshadowed when Cooper was admiring a fresco on a house in Glaris in 1828 during his first visit to Switzerland four years earlier:

> "On the space of the wall on one side of the window is a mounted knight, armed *cap-à-piè*, with his lance in the rest, in the act of tilting. On the opposite space, another mounted warrior, without armour, is drawing an arrow to the head. They appear to be opposed to each other, though separated by the windows and armorial bearings. All the windows have painted ornaments, and *a little boy, who forms part of one nearest*

the armed knight, is stretching out his hand, as if to seize the head of his lance [*my emphasis*]." - ***Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland*** (Cooper Edition/SUNY), Letter XVI, p. 178

1955 Swiss stamp commemorating the winegrowers' festival at Vévey



Just outside Sempach, Switzerland. The monolith marks the spot where, according to legend, Winkelried made a path to liberty for his comrades in arms. (The photos in this article have been taken either by the author or by Monika Kaiser while touring Switzerland.)