

James Fenimore Cooper's Long Tom Coffin & David Boltrope  
Compared with  
Sir Walter Scott's Dick Fletcher and  
John Maynard, the Helmsman of Lake Erie

by

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*a) The Task at Hand*

This article may be regarded as an outgrowth and continuation of my essay entitled “The Impact of Sir Walter Scott’s *The Pirate* (1822) and the Minor Character Dick Fletcher on the Creative Imagination of James Fenimore Cooper.” In that essay, this writer speculated that, given Cooper’s own admission of a direct impact, the minor character Dick Fletcher must have in some way exerted an influence upon the creation of Long Tom Coffin in Cooper’s first novel of the sea, *The Pilot* (1823 – [1]). This paper will consider the salient characteristics of Long Tom Coffin to see just how Cooper either built upon Dick Fletcher or rejected Fletcher as a valid example of a true-to-life mariner. In this regard, the minor character, David Boltrope, will also play a role. Finally, a further comparison will be made with John Maynard, the self-sacrificing hero of “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” [July 1845].

*b) Cooper vs. Scott*

The beginnings of maritime novels and sketches in the English language are not so old as one might think. The first successful novel that was truly maritime in character was James Fenimore Cooper’s first sea romance, *The Pilot*, which was in many respects a reaction to Sir Walter Scott’s novel, *The Pirate*, published only a year earlier. Cooper felt that Scott had woefully neglected to do the art of sailing justice, whether by navigating through treacherous shoals, sage maneuvering in sea battles, and – last but not least – by depicting a true-to-life mariner. Even the unconvincing whaling episode in Scott’s *The Pirate*, in which the whale escapes, is replaced in *The Pilot* with Long Tom’s successful thrust of the harpoon. Yet, even in this instance, the mariners are warned by Long Tom to leave a respectful distance between them and the whale “under its dying agonies” (p. 190).

c) *The Pilot vs. the Coxswain*

The main character in Cooper's *The Pilot*, the historical John Paul Jones [2], (who was indeed regarded by the British as a common pirate), goes by the name of "Mr. Gray," a fitting name for a man who remains both mysterious, ambivalent, and aloof throughout the novel. Gray's mindset is bent on glory through heroic action; selflessness is hardly a feature in his makeup. Yet Gray is a master pilot and strategist, and is able to prove his worth at sea, even if the human element seems strangely wanting. It is thus no wonder that a minor figure whose human qualities are clearly pronounced should outshine the main figure, who, in several respects, comes across to the reader like a stereotyped ideologue. Long Tom Coffin, the coxswain, immediately grabs the reader's attention and becomes the most fascinating figure in the novel and a model for American nautical literature.

d) *How Old Is an Old Hero?*

There seems to be a mistaken conception of what constitutes the age of a nautical hero in Cooper's works:

"The real seaman is not short and thickset, but tall and angular like Long Tom or tall and nicely proportioned like Tiller [in the *Water-Witch*]. He is in, or approaching, middle age [my emphasis]; Coffin's whiskers "began to be grizzled a little with age," and Tiller's brown hair "was already a little grizzled."

- Thomas Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 82

Cooper provides the actual age of Long Tom Coffin twice:

"I should have seen no beauty," said the generous lieutenant, laughing; but there is long-Tom, as hard-featured a youth of two score and ten as ever washed in brine, who has a heart as big, ay, bigger than that of a kraaken [sic]."

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 21, pp. 239-240

"A square-sail is a good sail to carry on a craft, dead afore it, and in heavy sea; but if fifty years can teach a man to know the weather, it's my judgment that should the *Ariel* break ground after the night turns eight bells, she'll need her main-sail to hold her up to her course."

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 21, p. 240

Of Thomas Tiller, we read:

“A small bullet head was set firmly on its broad foundation, and it was covered with a mass of brown hair that was already grizzled. The face was that of a man of thirty....”  
- *The Water-Witch*, Ch. 3, p. 34

No matter whether their hair is “grizzled” or not, it should be clear that there is a considerable difference in ages between Coffin and Tiller. Indeed, Long Tom is repeatedly referred to as “old” in *The Pilot* (1823) whereas Thomas Tiller is nowhere regarded as “old” in *The Water-Witch* (1830). Although fifty nowadays might be regarded as “middle-age,” it is anachronistic to transfer our conceptions of what is old nowadays to those of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Captain Titus of the ill-fated *Erie* (1841) drowned sixteen years afterwards at the age of 47. [3] The newspaper article announcing his death reads:

**Death of an Old Lake Captain.**

BUFFALO, Aug 11.—Capt Titus, an old lake commander, was drowned at Sandusky yesterday. He was captain of the steamer *Erie*, and saved from that vessel when she burned several years ago.

- *The Sun* (Baltimore, Maryland), Aug. 15, 1855, p. 1, c. 6

When the captain of the *Ariel*, young Barnstable, begins to doubt Long Tom’s fears of an approaching tempest, reference is made to Long Tom’s age:,

“How now, Tom, [...] have ye turned croaker in your old age? What see you, to cause such an old woman’s ditty!”

“’Tis no song of an old woman,” returned the cockswain [sic], with solemn earnestness, “but the warning of an old man; and one who has spent his days where there were no hills to prevent the winds of heaven from blowing on him, unless they were hills of salt water and foam. I judge, sir, there’ll be a heavy north-easter in upon us before the morning watch is called.”

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 21, pp. 240-241

It should be noted that Long Tom is not only viewed as “old,” but sees himself in the same light. This should not be taken to mean, however, that he is “old and feeble:”

“When erect, he [=Long Tom Coffin] stood nearly six feet and as many inches in his shoes, though, when elevated in his most perpendicular attitude, there was a forward inclination of his head and shoulders, that appeared to be the consequence of habitual confinement in limited lodgings. His whole frame was destitute of the rounded outlines of a well-formed man, though his enormous hands furnished a display of bones and sinews which gave indication of gigantic strength.”

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 2, p. 20

In Sir Walter Scott’s *The Pirate*, Dick Fletcher’s actual age is not mentioned but hinted at. It is clear that he is older than Clement Cleveland, who is the “pirate” the novel is named after, yet who strikes the reader as only a young man hopelessly in love and ashamed of his former marauding life. Cleveland’s friend, Jack Bunce, who bosses the loyal Fletcher about, cannot be much older than Cleveland. Indeed, Bunce’s silly notion of abducting Cleveland and his

love, Minna Troil, so that they will be united and can “sail away,” fails to consider Minna’s own abhorrence of a pirate’s life at sea, let alone the very thought of being married to a pirate. Such immaturity on Bunce’s part, which leads to Dick Fletcher’s senseless death, does not bespeak of years but of untried youth. That Dick Fletcher was obviously older than both Cleveland and Bunce becomes clear in Cleveland’s “obituary” of what Fletcher was and of what he might have been:

“Cleveland looked on the dead body, the rugged features of which had remained unaltered by the death-pang. ‘A bull-dog,’ he said, ‘of the true British breed, and, with a better counselor, would have been a better man.’”

- *The Pirate*, Ch. XL, p. 499

Cooper’s heroes are “bull-dogs.” They have incredible tenacity. They are strong. They are no longer “pups,” but tried and experienced. They hold strong views, they act decisively, and they know how to die. Fletcher, too, “expired without a groan” (p. 498). This notion of accepting death and, through acceptance, dying “unaltered by the death-pang,” is a hallmark of Cooper’s heroes. [4] But whereas Dick Fletcher expires seemingly without giving any consideration to the question of an after-life or to his own moral constitution, a Cooperian hero will often exhibit a very strong religious fiber.

#### e) *The Question of Moral Fiber*

Cleveland’s statement, “*with a better counselor, [Fletcher] would have been a better man,*” may be regarded as a challenge: How should a writer go about creating the quintessence of a mariner so as to make him *a better man*?

Long Tom Coffin, it might seem, combines both superstition and religion. An example of intertwining the two crops up in the following quote:

The cockswain lingered a moment, notwithstanding his promised obedience, and then ventured a request, that —

“Captain Barnstable would please call Mr. Merry from the gun; for I know, from having followed the seas my natural life, that singing in a gale is sure to bring the wind down upon a vessel the heavier; for He who rules the tempests is displeased that man’s voice shall be heard, when He chooses to send His own breath on the water.”

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 24, p. 278

Although a superstitious element is apparent in Coffin’s belief in the power of song, Long Tom’s interpretation of the weather also derives from his sensing God in Nature.

“There be streaked wind-galls in the offing, that speak as plainly, to all that see them, and know God’s language in the clouds, as ever you spoke through a trumpet, to

shorten sail; besides, sir, don't you hear the sea moaning, as if it knew the hour was at hand when it was to wake up from its sleep!"

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 2, p. 25

Certainly Long Tom's merely *reading* "the language of the clouds" cannot be viewed as *influencing* them. In Sir Walter Scott's *The Pirate*, "auld Norna of Fitful Head, the most fearful woman in all the isles" (p. 59), claimed to possess the power to calm a tempest and, chanting Norwegian poetry, played upon the glowing embers of pagan superstition still alive among the inhabitants of the Shetlands.

Cooper often views Nature as the "Temple of the Lord," where no churches built by the hand of man are needed:

That towns and settlements lead to sin, I will allow, but our lakes are bordered by forests, and one is every day called upon to worship God, in such a temple."

*The Pathfinder*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1981), Ch. II, p. 24

The belief that God permeates all of Nature is more a religious standpoint than superstition.

Long Tom's death was his own decision. When the helpless *Ariel* was breaking apart against the rocks, Long Tom chose to remain on board and go down with his ship. The *Ariel* is not an inanimate object to Long Tom:

"...it's as natural to love the craft you sail in, as it is to love one's self."

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 24, p. 278

The schooner is, to Long Tom, a living being:

"'Tis the poor thing herself," said the affected cockswain, "giving her last groans."

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 24, p. 286

After the *Ariel* is shattered to pieces, Barnstable, who safely reaches shore, keeps a lookout for Long Tom. He tells young midshipman Merry:

"Think boy, he may, at this moment, be looking at us, praying to his Maker that he would turn our eyes upon him; ay, praying to his God, for Tom often prayed, though he did it in his watch, standing, and in silence."

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 25, p. 290

Whereas Dick Fletcher did not pray, both Long Tom and John Maynard did:

"But, to speak the truth," he [=John Maynard] added, we are all in great danger; and I think if there were a little less *talking* and a little more *praying*, it would be the better for us, and none the worse for the boat."

"The Helmsman of Lake Erie," *Poughkeepsie Journal and Eagle*, July 19, 1845

In contrast to the equanimity with which Long Tom Coffin confronts death, Cooper presents the arch-villain Christopher Dillon. Like the frightened women passengers questioning Maynard in “The Helmsman of Lake Erie,” Dillon, too, asks Long Tom:

“Do you think there is much danger?” - *The Pilot*, Ch. 24, p. 286

When Dillon learns the awful truth, he decides to attempt to save himself by swimming to shore. Long Tom’s gives him the following advice:

“If ye are about to strive for your life, take with ye a stout heart and a clean conscience, and trust the rest to God!”

“God!” echoed Dillon, in the madness of his frenzy; “I know no God! There is no God that knows me!”

“Peace!” said the deep tones of the cockswain, in a voice that seemed to speak in the elements; “blasphemer, peace!”

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 24, p. 287

When Dillon’s corpse is washed ashore, Barnstable looks upon it in horror:

...“what wretch is this, boy! His form is un mutilated, and yet observe the eyes! They seem as if the sockets would not contain them, and they gaze as wildly as if their owner yet had life – the hands are open and spread, as though they would still buffet the waves!”

...Barnstable had turned away from the revolting sight, in disgust,....

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 25, pp. 290-291

The notion of the man who is not at peace with himself and who consequently suffers an excruciating death is a major theme in Cooper’s works. Even as Long Tom watched Dillon’s final struggle for life, we read:

“Calm, and inured to horrors, as was the veteran seaman, he involuntarily passed his hand before his brow, to exclude the look of despair he encountered....”

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 24, pp. 288

In Cooper’s *The Chainbearer*, published in the same year as “The Helmsman of Lake Erie,” Aaron Thousandacres’ death is described. The first-person narrator states:

“...finding the sight too frightful for even my nerves, I veiled my eyes.”

- *The Chainbearer*, Ch. XXVIII, final paragraph

Long Tom was an old, experienced, conscientious, weather-beaten salt, who – in the winter of his life – still possessed enormous strength. (Even the *Ariel*’s heaviest cannon, which Coffin deftly aimed, was named “Long Tom.”) He was deeply religious and, in some respects

regarded, whether rightly or not, as superstitious. Young Mr. Merry viewed Long Tom's questionable decision to go down with the *Ariel* as due to "his superstitious pride" (p. 293).

A different interpretation can be gleaned from Long Tom's own mindset. After the main-sail had been brought down by enemy fire, the *Ariel* no longer had sufficient canvas to be navigated away from the rocky shoreline. When her fate had become clear to all, we read:

"At this moment of appalling apprehension, the coxswain [sic] exhibited the calmest resignation. He knew all had been done, that lay in the power of man, to urge the little vessel from the land, and it was now evident to his experienced eyes, that it had been done in vain; but, considering himself as a sort of fixture in the schooner, he was quite prepared to abide her fate, be it for better or for worse."

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 24, p. 280

The *Ariel* to Long Tom is not an inanimate pile of wood; she is both personified and, in a very concrete sense, Long Tom's "home," one of the strongest attachments in a human being's life. The loss of home can, in many instances, be equated to the loss of all that is held dear. [5] Here again, this critic fails to see anything "superstitious" in Long Tom's decision to go down with the ship. It is much more a sense of loyalty to values he holds sacred. That he is "resigned" to die for such values, even if no-one is saved and even if the ship is no longer under attack, might well be viewed as the lower rung of the long ladder leading to a John Maynard.

The body of the coxswain, like that of John Maynard, was not washed ashore,

"...for the sea was never known to give up the body of the man who might be, emphatically, called its own dead."

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 24, pp. 291

Although Coffin's moral qualities are superior to those of Dick Fletcher, it should nonetheless be remembered that Dick Fletcher did not cringe before the specter of death as did Dillon. [6]

#### f) *Sailor vs. Soldier – Sea vs. Land*

Long Tom Coffin does not sing out of tune like Dick Fletcher. In fact, there is no mention anywhere of Long Tom singing. He does not tease pretty girls like Brenda Troil. He can read the clouds, take over the tiller, and harpoon a whale. The strongest (and tallest) man on board the *Ariel*, he is capable of carrying out dangerous missions. An example of the latter is Coffin accompanying Dillon back ashore to obtain a prisoner exchange. Dillon, however, fails to keep his word, which seriously heightens the danger to Long Tom.

The land missions (which Long Tom considered “as being of a nature never to be attempted by seamen” - Ch. 8, p. 83) in Cooper’s novel are reminiscent of the weakness of Sir Walter Scott’s *The Pirate*, which never finds the open sea. In this respect, Cooper’s *The Pilot* sometimes seems constrained by an unnecessary dependence upon land. Certainly the sea has been Long Tom’s element since birth:

“Give me plenty of sea-room, and good canvass, where there is no ’casion for pilots at all, sir. For my part, I was born on board a chebacco-man, and never could see the use of more land than now and then a small island, to raise vegetables, and to dry your fish....” - *The Pilot*, Ch. 2, p. 21

and

“For as long as I have followed the waters, sir, and that has been ever since I’ve drawn my rations, seeing that I was born while the boat was crossing Nantucket shoals,....” - *The Pilot*, Ch. 17, p. 185

To get some idea of what Long Tom thought of soldiers serving on land, Long Tom’s response to the good-natured British Captain Borroughcliffe, who – impressed by Long Tom’s stature – unsuccessfully tried to recruit Long Tom for the British army must be seen as both emphatic and humorous:

“A messmate, before a shipmate; a shipmate, before a stranger; a stranger, before a dog; but a dog before a soldier!” - *The Pilot*, Ch. 22, p. 254

Indeed, one might wonder whether it was because Captain Borroughcliffe was the British enemy or because he was, to Long Tom’s way of thinking, of the category of a soldier that Long Tom irately attacked Borroughcliffe right there and then:

“...One more struggle, in which the captain discovered his incompetency to make any defence against the strength of a man who managed him as if he had been a child, decided the matter.” - *The Pilot*, Ch. 22, p. 255

In the successful sea battle against the British cutter *Alacrity*, Long Tom is even compared to Neptune:

“The battle would probably have terminated very differently from what previous circumstances had indicated, had not a wild-looking figure appeared in the cutter’s channels at that moment, issuing from the sea, and gaining the deck at the same instant. It was long Tom, with his iron visage rendered fierce by his previous discomfiture, and his grizzled locks drenched with the briny element, from which he had risen, looking like Neptune with his trident. Without speaking, he poised his



harpoon, and with a powerful effort, pinned the unfortunate Englishman to the mast of his own vessel.”

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 18, p. 203

g) *Obedience*

Although Long Tom is obedient to the commands of Barnstable of the *Ariel*, a father-son relationship is revealed.

Barnstable:

“A man can never regard his ship as he does his shipmates. I sailed with him, boy [=Merry], when everything seemed bright and happy, as at your age; when, as he often expressed it, I knew nothing and feared nothing. I was then a truant from an old father and a kind mother, and he did for me, which no parents could have done in my situation – he was my father and my mother on the deep! – hours, days, even months, has he passed in teaching me the art of our profession; and now, in my manhood, he has followed me from ship to ship, from sea to sea, and has only quitted me to die, where I should have died – as if he felt the disgrace of abandoning the poor *Ariel* to her fate, by herself!”

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 25, p. 293

A few lines further on, Barnstable’s age is alluded to as he mourns Long Tom’s death:

“They (=tears) were followed by a violent burst of emotion, such is seldom exhibited in the meridian of life....”

- *The Pilot*, *ibid.*

In Sir Walter Scott’s *The Pirate*, Dick Fletcher, is often seen as the epitome of obedience. “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” also embraces Dick Fletcher as a flat figure who snaps to attention to do his commander’s bidding. Although Fletcher’s character in the *Pirate* is more complex than his brief appearance in “The Helmsman,” would indicate, the notion of sailors exhibiting iron discipline and obedience, particularly when their vessel is under attack, is stressed in Cooper’s *The Pilot*:

“Even the wounded and dying, who fell in every part of the ship, stifled their groans, under the influence of severe discipline, which gave a character to every man and each movement of the vessel; and those officers who were required to speak, were heard only in the lowest tones of resolute preparation.”

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 33, pp. 398-399

*h) David Boltrope – Dick Fletcher’s Shadow?*

Cooper’s coxswain, which is only another word for “helmsman,” Long Tom Coffin, exemplifies a sailor of a much higher moral order than Scott’s Dick Fletcher. Cooper, however, was confronted with a structural problem due to Long Tom’s premature demise in Chapter 24 of *The Pilot* (Eleven chapters remained.) The loss of Long Tom created an embarrassing vacuum, which Cooper filled with the old sailing-master David Boltrope. Although Boltrope enjoys the company of the ship’s chaplain, he is hardly what could be termed “religious” or “pious.” In this sense, he is reminiscent of Dick Fletcher. Like most of Cooper’s outdoor men, whether frontiersmen or sailors, Boltrope is “weather-beaten.” He is also, like Fletcher, given to “broad, rough language” (Ch. 32, p. 375), and was not one to spurn the soothing qualities of a glass of grog (Ch. 7, p. 81). His manner is also not the gentlest:

“Boltrope groped his way into the hold of the seamen, where, kicking one of the most fortunate of the men from his birth, he established himself in the place, with all the cool indifference to the other’s comfort, that had grown with his experience, from the time when he was treated thus cavalierly in his own person, to the present moment.” -

*The Pilot*, Ch. 32, p. 383

Edward Griffith, the commanding officer, addresses Boltrope, who has been mortally wounded in combat:

“I heard you were hurt, Boltrope,” said Griffith, taking him kindly by the hand; “but as I know you are not unused to being marked by shot, I trust you we shall soon see you again on deck.”

“Ay, ay,” returned the master, “you’ll want no spy-glasses to see the old hulk as you launch it into the sea. I have had shot, as you say, before now to tear my running gear, and even to knock a splinter out of some of my timbers, but this fellow has found his way into my bread-room; and the cruise of life is up!”

*The Pilot*, Ch. 34, p. 412

When Boltrope is told by his friend, the chaplain, to prepare himself for the transition about to take place, the old mariner good-naturedly responds:

“As for being prepared, parson, that is your business and not mine; therefore, as there is but little time to spare, why, the sooner you set about it the better; and to save unnecessary trouble, I may as well tell you not to strive to make too much of me, for, I must own it to my shame, I never took learning kindly. If you can fit me for some middling birth in the other world, like the one I hold in this ship, it will suit me as well, and, perhaps, be easier to all hands of us.”

*The Pilot*, Ch. 34, pp. 412-413

Boltrope’s only concern before passing away is his eighty-year-old mother. Griffith assures Boltrope that the old lady will be properly looked after. Boltrope, choking with emotion, then passes away:

“The tongue of the master failed him, but a look of heart-felt satisfaction gleamed across his rough visage, as its muscles suddenly contracted, when the faded lineaments slowly settled into the appalling stiffness of death.”

*The Pilot*, Ch. 34, p. 416

David Boltrope’s death is placed close to the end of Chapter 34, only ten pages before the end of the novel. The solicitous attention he receives at the hands of both Barnstable and Griffith is, to say the least, moving. Whether the attempt to sweeten Boltrope’s final minutes is completely warranted is, however, another question. Certainly Cooper is again attempting to introduce an old true-to-life salt who knows how to die.

Whereas Long Tom Coffin might be regarded as a weak prelude to a John Maynard, David Boltrope is reminiscent of a Dick Fletcher. Boltrope, like Fletcher, is something of a diamond in the rough. He does not die a Cooperian Christian death, yet he, like Fletcher, neither whimpers nor groans.

i) *Was the Death Worth Dying for?*

The question haunting this writer’s mind is whether the death Fletcher and Coffin endured was worth dying for. Dick Fletcher’s life was snuffed out due to an ill-conceived plan. He was, in the final analysis, victimized – yet he allowed this to happen due to his sense of loyalty and obedience to Jack Bunce. In Long Tom Coffin’s case, Long Tom chose not to desert the *Ariel* but to go down with the ship – in a sense, a noble notion and uttered by Commodore Lawrence in the War of 1812: “Don’t give up the ship!” [7] Yet the *Ariel* did not flounder while under attack, but afterwards; her hopeless condition was clear to all aboard, including Long Tom. While Captain Barnstable might feel conscience-stricken for not remaining on board, to have done so would have been madness. In other words, Long Tom’s sentimental identification with the *Ariel* and his desire not to serve on a different ship, but to end his life right there and then, while helping no-one, not even the *Ariel*, suggests that he, like Dick Fletcher, died in vain.

John Maynard, on the other hand, did not die in vain. His death saved both passengers and crew. In this sense, the sketch “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” illustrates the iron will of a man to endure excruciating pain without uttering a groan so that others may live. It is his love of God and his unerring sense of what is right that gives Maynard the almost superhuman strength to steer the steamer to the saving shore. The notion of a *meaningful* death is underscored in “The Helmsman of Lake Erie” in contradistinction to both Dick Fletcher’s and Long Tom Coffin’s deaths. If, as this writer has long assumed, Cooper was searching for the key to describe the true-to-life mariner, the old, weather-beaten tar, who, in spite of his age “*has a heart as big, ay, bigger than that of a kraaken,*” who could inspire others by his selflessness and at the same time augment acts of civil courage, what could have been a better model, or “*a better man*” than the Helmsman of Lake Erie?

*Notes:*

References to James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot; A Tale of the Sea*, are from the following edition:

Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986. Edited with an Historical Introduction and Explanatory Notes by Kay Seymour House.

Sir Walter Scott's *The Pirate* is taken from the following edition:

London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1912. With forty-five illustrations.

References to "The Helmsman of Lake Erie," are taken from the earliest known printing of the anonymous sketch in *The Poughkeepsie Journal and Eagle* (Poughkeepsie, New York), July 19, 1845 .

- 1) There appears to be an open question as to when, exactly, *The Pilot* was published. In her Historical Introduction, Kay Seymour house writes: "The Pilot was published 7 January 1824." [p. xxvii]. Cooper, in his 1849 Preface [p. 5] writes quite simply: "The Pilot was published in 1823." Whether in December 1823 or early January 1824 (the date used in my article on Cooper and religion), this writer has opted in this essay for Cooper's statement in 1849.

My earlier treatment of Long Tom Coffin and Dillon in the framework of Cooper's religious views, which the present article in some instances unavoidably duplicates, may also be consulted in the following article:

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," Aug. 2009, pp. 13-17: <http://johnmaynard.net/MARTYRSDEATH.pdf>,

- 2) Cooper, in his Naval Biographies, *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers* (1846) points out the following alteration of name:

"It is certain that, while resident in Virginia, he assumed the name of Jones; calling himself John Paul Jones, instead of John Paul, which was his legal and proper appellation."

From the Cambridge Scholars Publishing Edition – CSP – vol. 45, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2009, p. 129.

In the Preface of the Naval Biographies, Cooper wrote:

“These sketches originally appeared in Graham’s Magazine, a periodical for which they were expressly written. The present opportunity for enlarging, correcting, and it is hoped, for improving them, has not been neglected. [...] In the cases of Paul Jones and Oliver Hazard Perry, in particular, the first appearance of the respective sketches brought into our hands a considerable amount of additional documents that have thrown new light on the several careers of those two officers.”

*Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers*, Preface, p. 1

In other words, it is clear that, in the mid-1840’s, Cooper was still very much absorbed with both the main character of *The Pilot* and with the history of the Battle of Lake Erie.

- 3) The *Baltimore Sun* fails to mention Capt. Titus’s age. Referring, however, to Titus’s testimony before the Coroners’ Inquest in 1841, we read:

“*T. J. Titus sworn.*— My age is 33; have been on the lake 16 years; have been master of a vessel 9 or 10 years; commanded the schooner *United States*, schr. *Aurora*, *S. B.*“

The *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, Thursday Evening, August 12th, 1841

As fourteen years separate Titus’s death from the Inquest, the “old” Lake Erie captain was 47.

- 4) Cf. Barry *Op. cit.*: <http://johnmaynard.net/MARTYRSDEATH.pdf>
- 5) The question of “home” is taken up by Alice Dunscombe, the pilot’s former love. John Paul Jones was born on the British Isles yet fighting against his own countrymen.

“Forever harping on that word, home!” said the Pilot, who now detected the timid approaches of Alice to her hidden meaning. [...]

“It is the dearest of all terms to every woman, John, for it embraces the dearest of all ties! If your dames of America are ignorant of its charm, all the favours which God has lavished on their land, will avail their happiness but little.”

- *The Pilot*, Ch. 31, p. 364

Needless to say, the Pilot’s rebuke of Alice will only strike the reader as cold and unfeeling, whereas Long Tom’s voluntary death is the most moving episode in the novel.

- 6) For comment on Dillon’s “involuntary screech,” cf. Barry *Op. cit.*, p. 54, Ftn. 23: <http://johnmaynard.net/MARTYRSDEATH.pdf>.

- 7) Both James Fenimore Cooper and James Lawrence were born in Burlington, New Jersey. Their families knew one another. Lawrence was also commander of the *Wasp*, which Cooper served on. Captain Lawrence is often remembered for his patriotic dying words; “Don’t give up the ship!” in the War of 1812. Cooper provided an additional interpretation: “Don’t give up the ships!” – i.e., a strong navy as a bulwark for a strong America.

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