

become commander-in-chief. An old, blind man sees the assurances of national history encoded within the structure of mythic biography. Romantic history permits Uncle Juvinnell to wear blinders and glimpse only the security of the already completed past, but not the irresolute nature of the present. Supported by this generic foundation, Washington overcomes the doubts of Reverend Thayer, as well as the nation's disintegration, to occupy a position of authority. He accords the text both a centered focus and a clearly ordained sequence of events to follow. His biography is the narrative of America; he enacts the mythic course of humble origins expanding to sovereign dimensions. In this Washington, individual biography and national history coincide, each attaining the moral destiny that national narrative promises.

Washington's life authoritatively guides *The Farmer Boy*, just as he guided the young nation to a reputed freedom. But since the figure of Washington embodied such a resilient example of patriarchal authority, it was no longer necessary that he tell the truth. His fatherly benevolence may have led to a confident biographical narrative, but as Melville argues in *Billy Budd*, "truth" is another matter. Washington's reputation as truth teller may oblige Uncle Juvinnell to say that "we must keep within the bounds of true history, and content ourselves with the knowledge of that which really did happen," yet his patriarchal authority as a storyteller to children allows him to escape his own words. Uncle Juvinnell thus reshapes the story of the cherry tree, itself already an invention of Parson Weems. Surveying his plantation, George's father sees the fallen cherry tree, and in turn, he sets upon the bodies of his slaves. But as Uncle Juvinnell informs his listeners, his bondsmen deny the trespass, rolling the whites of their eyes in buffoonlike protestations of innocence. Yet Father Washington's undisputed authority as master and expert on slave demeanor allows him to dismiss the slaves' truth. Knowing the character of his slaves, he selects the most likely villain and makes ready to apply the switch to the slave boy's backside. Indeed, as Uncle Juvinnell tells the tale, George's sire is correct in his actions, even if his judgment is wrong, for the elder Washington is well aware of the slave's "natural" propensity for rascality: "Now, you must know there was not a more audacious, mischief-making, neck-or-nothing black brat than this same Jerry to be found on the banks of the Rappanhannock, which is a very long river indeed." Salvation ap-

pears in the figure of the young George, who intercedes just before Jerry's punishment: "O papa, papa! . . . don't whip poor Jerry: if somebody must be whipped, let it be me; for it was I, and not Jerry, that cut the cherry-tree."<sup>33</sup>

Whereas the "tragic mulattoes" of *Clotel* parade both the blood of founding fathers and black slaves as part of an effort to denounce the inconsistency of democratic institutions, Uncle Juvinnell's purpose in pairing young George with an ill-mannered slave is more benign. Washington becomes the savior of Jerry by substituting his body for the slave's; through his body, the slave can become part of a community knit together in the symbolic body of this Americanized Christ. Father Washington kindly counsels his slave congregation: "Look on him, my black children, look on him, and be as near like him as you can, if you would have the love of your master and the good-will of all around you." In no way, however, does he urge an egalitarian community; authority and hierarchy remain clearly delineated. Washington symbolizes a covenant that places, again to use the words Winthrop, "some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in subjection." As a political relic charged with religious overtones, Washington signifies the logic that makes some masters and others slaves—if Winthrop's understandings of hierarchy and Christian charity are severely perverted along racial lines. Under the master's interpretation, George not only martyrs himself to regenerate the black slave, he also redeems a patriarchal authority that has fallen into the ways of poor judgment. Father Washington has falsely accused one of his "black children," and although the law sanctions a master's wrongful punishment of his slave, the son proves the righteousness of that authority by allowing it to be exercised upon his own body.<sup>34</sup> In the very moment that George disagrees with his father's judgment, he submits himself to that same judge. Although young George tells the truth, his object is not truth alone; rather, he sacrifices himself to reaffirm his father as authority by submitting to his father's punishment. More impossible than telling a lie would be for the son to subvert the authority of the father.

*The Farmer Boy* tells its tale self-consciously, in that it is the story of a kind, elderly man narrating the life of Washington to his nephews and nieces one Christmas. This narrative frame reiterates the lessons of authority that George's example teaches. Uncle Juvinnell

commands attention because he is the storyteller, and in his tale the children are bound in a community of listeners. Washington's narrative provides a communal vision with clearly marked social positions, just as his body serves as the locus of morals for the slave children along the Rappanhannock. The audience respectfully listens to the teller as though he were speaking the truth. As every evening begins a new chapter, the reader watches the rambunctious children settle down, lulled into proper behavior by the narrative. The girls listen as ladies, pressing their uncle for details of balls and dresses, and the boys listen as men, hankering after fights with Indians. And as every evening begins, a servant named Black Daddy caters to the wants of this little gathering, bringing treats and refreshments on a tray. Although never explicitly labeled a slave, Black Daddy caters to the narrative of hierarchy as well; like Jerry, who finds his place in the example of young master, the avuncular slave unobtrusively hovers at the edges of the narrative frame. Though named as father and affectionately marked with a paternal sobriquet, Black Daddy exercises no authority; he is an instrument of those who participate in the national myth of Washington. In a manner similar to the non-narrative appearance of slavery in many Washington biographies (that is, slavery appears only after Washington has died), Black Daddy enters only before and after each night's storytelling, never barging in during the middle of Uncle Juvinell's narrative. Race remains excessive to the narrative frame of the biography lest, like the mischievous Jerry, the ambivalent legacy of slavery becomes disruptive in the context of Uncle Juvinell's antebellum present.

Young George and father Washington enact a didactic tableau to convince the rebellious slave of the moral propriety of white authority; in contrast, Uncle Juvinell's generation, alarmed by its own belatedness, falters in its attempts to convey a similar lesson. The past can effectively manage contradictions like Jerry; however, the present narrative frame encircling that storied past cannot control its racial context as forthrightly as father Washington manages his slaves. At the temporal site of subsequent tellings, race can appear only in the margins, subdued by displacement. Exiled to the complacent margins of the peculiar narrative frame, slavery exhibits none of the impertinence that could question the storyteller's authority;

instead, as a cultural reference, slavery cowers before the necessary coherence of the national narrative.

This story of Washington and the story of his narration mutually reiterate accounts of community that in 1863 stood as relics of a broken past. Slavery in the text is as well-managed as Black Daddy's presence among the listeners to Uncle Juvinell. Yet the memories and figures that had been placed at the margins of both *The Farmer Boy* and the antebellum present return from narrative exile in critical fashion. Slavery—no matter how docile Jerry or Black Daddy might appear—alters filial demeanor, making even the most obedient sons and prefaces into rebels.

#### THE NAME OF THE FATHER IN COOPER'S *THE SPY*

Washington revealed a coherent American identity at a time when cultural authority resolutely brought the national narrative toward closure, when Jacksonian democracy represented the myth of the common man's enfranchisement, increasing governmental centralization, and unprecedented territorial expansion. In James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy: A Tale of Neutral Ground* (1821), only Washington can resolve ambiguous identities because his is unequivocally the identity of the true American father. And as national father, he judiciously exercises the authority to lead Cooper's narrative to closure. An overnight success that in its equally celebrated stage adaptation ran until 1852, *The Spy* supplied the nation with nativist themes, establishing Revolutionary romance as a legitimate American genre. "The Spy' is lurking in every closet," says the male narrator at the outset of Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824). From this popular mingling of narrative and history, the romance figures as a "nation-building novel" whose plots, themes, and resolutions strive both "to fill in a history that would increase the legitimacy of the emerging nation and by the opportunity to direct that history towards a future ideal."<sup>35</sup>

*The Spy* unfolds a story of deception and ruse by centering on the travails of the aristocratic Wharton household smack in the middle of contested territory. Burning barns and saber battles surround the family's ill-chosen retreat from the horrors of war. Travelers and

guests visit the Wharton estate, yet no one knows if they are for the king or for the colonies. The Wharton's neighbor, a Yankee peddler named Harvey Birch, is the most enigmatic character, communicating with both sides, slipping ghostlike past sentries and pickets, and espousing no definitive political alignment. Although Birch really is a "useful agent of the leaders of the revolution," that usefulness depends upon his appearance as a mercenary sympathizer to the king. To be the patriot, Birch has to act the part of the traitor. The Continentals curse Birch as a fiendish spy and pursue him with a noose throughout the novel. Masquerade abounds. When the son, Henry Wharton, visits his family, he does so disguised by a red wig and an eye patch. A British colonel poses as a bachelor so that he can engage in bigamy and wed the eldest of the Wharton daughters. The peddler cross-dresses as a common washerwoman, a black slave disguises himself as a British officer destined for the gallows, and a condemned spy escapes by assuming the identity of a black slave—all are incidents that make the narrative space as unstable as the boundary between British and Continental territory over which the two armies battle. In Cooper's world of revolutionary espionage, where appearances deceive, Washington has the authority to tell the truth. By relying upon Washington, *The Spy* corrects the history of many people who

wore masks, which even to this day have not been thrown aside; and many an individual has gone down to the tomb, stigmatised as foe to the rights of his countrymen, while, in secret, he has been the useful agent of the leaders of the revolution; and, on the other hand, could the repositories of divers flaming patriots have been opened to the light of day, royal protections would have been discovered concealed under piles of British gold.<sup>36</sup>

Only Washington possesses the authority to reposition everyone in a secure identity. "Washington can see beyond the hollow views of pretended patriots," the actor playing Harvey Birch told theater audiences. In the novel, the general sees through the disguise of the British captain, Henry Wharton, and later he cancels the orders demanding the arrest of this dutiful son, whose only crime was visiting his family. Like young George in *The Farmer Boy*, the mature Washington confirms patriarchal authority by perceiving that Henry's motivation in passing undetected into territory controlled by

colonists is not military subterfuge, but the simply the desire of a son to return home. Cloaked in the identity of Harper, Washington sanctions Henry's deliverance; he tells Wharton's sister with characteristic candor that refuses any imputation of pride or duplicity, "Miss Wharton, that I bear no mean part, in the unhappy struggle between England and America, it might now be useless to deny. You owe your brother's escape, this night, to my knowledge of his innocence, and the remembrance of my word" (407). The supreme judge, Washington divides the innocent from the damned with his own "word," with his own name.<sup>37</sup>

Wharton's masquerade of his own identity has created precarious divisions where national union and narrative closure once seemed imminent. If he is executed as a spy, marriage between Southerner and Northerner will never occur, and hopes for union—whether conjugal and national—will never come to fruition. Wharton's best friend, Major Dunwoodie of the American forces, has eyes for Wharton's sister, but if Major Dunwoodie's troops hang Wharton, certainly no alliance can occur. Washington's signature removes the enmity between friends and grants Dunwoodie permission to return to his plantation, where Wharton's sister can act as his nurse. Holy union, previously stymied by political differences between families, comes courtesy of Washington's fatherly influence. Wharton's salvation and his reconciliation with Dunwoodie symbolically magnifies in significance to represent a coherent national narrative. The New Yorker, Wharton, and the Virginian, Dunwoodie, put aside their differences and become kin, a legacy they pass on to their sons who, at the end of the novel, appear as comrades in arms during the War of 1812. Sectional dissimilarities vanish as North and South join in holy matrimony, making clear how both antebellum household and national culture located authority in the figure of the father. Washington's power to secure a propitious resolution for family and nation in one stroke proves the bonds of national union to be as strong as those cementing domesticity.

The name of Washington releases Wharton from the stigma of being a British spy. Cooper prefers not to relate second-hand that this redcoat passes unmolested, but includes the text of Washington's letter, authorized with his own signature, as a source of narrative authority. Key conflicts and decisions find resolution and justification in letters and orders that end with the indisputable seal of American

authority: "Washington." Cooper relies upon the cultural authority of Washington's legacy to supply episodes of his narrative with verisimilitude and satisfying moral resolution. Under Washington's auspices, Cooper imprints historical romance with "truth"—though *The Confidence-Man* must make us uneasy about any conjunctions between "truth" and authority, even Washington's. So sacred is Washington's signature that to corrupt it represents the most grievous sin, payable with one's life. Dunwoodie apprehends Wharton traveling with forged credentials that nevertheless bear Washington's authentic signature. Although "this name is no counterfeit," Wharton's own identity as an honorable soldier falls under suspicion for coupling the true signature of Washington with the "fictitious name" he has assumed to pass the American picket (84). For this offense, Wharton must accompany Dunwoodie to the highlands, where a military court sentences him to death. Tampering with this American authority threatens to render murky the distinction between authentic and counterfeit. Unable to tolerate the ambiguous state of affairs generated by the treasonous pilfering of Washington's signature, unable to have confidence in a situation where a patriot's virtues may be only appearance, the court eradicates these spurious doubts by commanding the most determinate closure—"recommending him to be executed by hanging, before nine o'clock on the following morning" (353).

So sacred is Washington's affidavit that Birch swallows it as though he were partaking of the host. Captured by Dunwoodie's troops as an agent of British general Sir Henry Clinton, Birch refuses to divulge the truth that would allow him to escape the gallows. Saying this, he reaches into the folds of his shirt and produces a document that the reader knows to be Washington's verification of the peddler's loyalty to the American cause. Rather than show this sacred signature to the Continentals, Birch swallows the paper, and is then thoroughly prepared for death. Having eaten the patriotic host, the spy calmly accepts his fate, assured of eternal deliverance for his service to Washington. As a Christian martyr who dies rather than renounce Christ, Birch chooses death rather than forswear his faith in the icon of the nation. Later, as he helps Wharton to escape, Birch recalls the times of temptation when he has been plagued by doubt and despair: "There was no pity, no consolation near, to soothe my anguish. Every

thing seemed to have deserted me. I even thought that HE had forgotten that I lived" (390). Although Birch's echo of Christ on the cross suggests that God is "HE," the text poses another alternative—that "HE" is the supreme commander of the American forces. Birch has emphasized the third person singular only one other time in the novel: confronted with execution, he takes solace in the faith that "he will do my memory justice at least" (230). The stage directions for this scene in the play, which script Birch with hands clasped "in energetic devotion" and eyes cast toward heaven, further encouraged Americans to affiliate Birch's "he" with an ever-watchful patriarch.<sup>38</sup> With Godlike authority, Washington will rescue Birch from perpetual ignominy and secure him the salvation of honor after death. Like those who refuse to utter the divine name, Yahweh, this humble peddler will gladly die a martyr to patriotism rather than speak the name of the final American authority.

Because of his stubborn faith, Harvey Birch never reveals his true identity while alive. The text threatens to end the narrative of his life, an American spy, without a clear sense of resolution. Whereas Washington repeatedly signs his name in *The Spy*, his signature acting as the standard of patriotic loyalty, Birch can communicate information to the Continentals only anonymously. His messages and warnings have no author, and hence Birch himself has no authority to verify his true character. Denied even the authority to sign his own name, the spy obviously lacks authority to name others; he understands he can never exercise the patriarchal authority of a father. Telling the presumed traitor that the day of judgment will arrive when Harper "will not blush to acknowledge you in his true character," Washington then gives Birch a certificate proving his identity as an American patriot, saying that while the document may be of no use to the peddler himself, "it may be serviceable to your children" (453, 454). Birch is destined to die alone in the world; no kin will clear his name and bring a final justice to the tale: "'Children!' exclaimed the peddler, 'can I give to a family the infamy of my name!'" (454). Forever denied patriarchal authority, Birch sadly yet resolutely accepts the ultimate unhappiness that is to be his reward. Leaving no descendants who will discard the legacy of alienation and integrate happily, marrying into a community, Birch nevertheless prepares the way for a conjugal romance be-

tween families of Southern patriots and Northern loyalists that reaffirms the national project.

Even though Birch's life ends short of any resolution except death, *The Spy* as narrative achieves a perfect sense of closure. The final page un.masks all pretenders and removes the stigma from the graves of supposed British agents. It comes as no surprise that it is Washington who accords the narrative the authority to legislate closure. For the sons of the Revolution, who in this case are the male descendants of Wharton and Dunwoodie, now united in resisting the British at Niagara Falls during the War of 1812, Washington speaks from beyond the grave to perform the last rites for the forgotten patriot, securing him a national destiny. On the dead body of Harvey Birch, his last years no doubt spent as an outcast, an Ishmael howling alone in the wilderness, the American soldiers find a note reading,

Circumstances of political importance, which involve the lives and fortunes of many, have hitherto kept secret what this paper now reveals. Harvey Birch has for years been a faithful and unrequited servant of his country. Though man does not, may God reward him for his conduct!

—Geo. Washington (463)

Now complete with a signature as awesome and sublime as the cataract that frames this ultimate revelation of American identity, Cooper's narrative can end. Although a single sentence does follow this authorizing signature, Cooper has no authority to offer any new information that would propel the story forward beyond Washington. He writes in lapidary fashion, "It was the SPY OF THE NEUTRAL GROUND, who died as he had lived, devoted to his country, and a martyr to her liberties" (463). Significantly, this final sentence is declarative; it has the air of completion and finality that marks history as an authoritative telling. Only Washington has the authority to act upon history; in contrast, the narrative cannot act without Washington. All that follows Washington's signature is a summation of the action that Washington has already resolved. *The Spy* refuses to proceed where Cooper's Washington has not tread. Rather than detailing new events, the text returns to its own finished history. Departing from the textual past inscribed by Washington would be for a historical romance to cast off genre and precedent and venture into the neutral ground of narrative without authority. Once blessed

with Washington's word, *The Spy* stops developing, now content to tell itself its own history.

#### RACE AND THE PARRICIDAL PREFACE

Washington's actions of reconciliation and redemption in Cooper's text allow *The Spy* to operate as a "nation-building novel" in which Southerner weds Northerner and sires children who, unlike their parents, have a national rather than a regional affiliation. But by 1850, the figure of Washington no longer could tell this national "truth" of union and future homogeneity. Firebrands like Calhoun rejected reading Washington as an icon of federal harmony and offered another interpretation of the founding father that said the narrative was not national but sectional. Washington's status as slaveholder provided Calhoun and others with the legitimacy to dissent from the overarching apparatus of national narrative. A few weeks after Clay in 1850 introduced measures for Congress to rededicate the American public by distributing Washington's Farewell Address, Calhoun offered these words in the Senate:

Nor can the Union be saved by invoking the name of that illustrious Southerner whose mortal remains repose on the western bank of the Potomac. He was one of us—a slaveholder and a planter. . . . Nor can we find any thing in his history to deter us from seceding from the Union, should it fail to fulfil the objects for which it was instituted, by being permanently and hopelessly converted into the means of oppressing instead of protecting us. On the contrary, we find much in his example to encourage us, should we be forced to the extremity of deciding between submission and disunion.<sup>39</sup>

Within this context, *The Spy's* continuing popularity with nineteenth-century audiences no doubt testifies to a desire for repeated rituals of national affirmation, but alterations in later editions questioned the authority of original narratives, insinuating fractures in the bodies, myths, and plots that articulated the American body politic. Consider how the 1849 edition of *The Spy* opens on a far different note than the original 1821 text. In an introduction written for the later edition, Cooper addresses the reader, but he does so without a convincing sense of authority. Gaps and ruptures imply a lack of control: the narrative about to be received is not a seamless discourse

of fictive American history. Absences unceremoniously interrupt the text. Cooper can begin only with the subjunctive, insinuating a corps of doubts: "The author has often been asked if there were any foundation in real life, for the delineation of the principal character in this book" (v). He continues to relate the circumstances of the novel's publication and appeals to one "Mr. ——." as witness to the factual nature of *The Spy* (vii). But like Harvey Birch, the identity of "Mr. ——." remains in question. According to Cooper's remarks in 1849, the narrative is true, derived from an unnamed authority—but how authoritative is a source that cannot avow itself? Repeatedly mentioned, the lacuna "Mr. ——." undermines the text's authority. By the end of the novel, however, the signature of Washington fills this space, sealing up any textual rupture, thereby reestablishing faith in narrative authority. In fact, in the 1849 address to the reader, Cooper explains Washington's role in securing closure for his narrative. Financial considerations dictated that "the last chapter," closing with Washington's signature, "was actually written, printed, and paged, several weeks before the chapters which precede it were even thought of" (ix). Though lacking a complete vision of the story's course, Cooper finds in Washington the authority to resolve what was incomplete and deliver the narrative—just as Washington had delivered the nation—to the promised land of closure.

This patriarchal authority supports a hierarchal vision in which any suggestion that could disrupt the course of narrative is contained by a textual apparatus of silence and insignificance. Waiting obsequiously in the wings of *The Spy* until his comic presence is called for stands the Wharton's black slave, Caesar. He occupies the same abject position as Black Daddy in *The Farmer Boy*; both receive representation not so much as human figures but as buoys marking the limits of an authority that is at once textual and cultural. Given the strong presence of Washington as well as an overall commitment to the national mission in both stories, neither Caesar nor Black Daddy utters any critique of the narrative that encapsulates them. Plantation master and founding father will not suffer any impudence. Throughout, Caesar remains firmly in his place, voicing all desires and fears in a thick dialect. Even the potentially subversive situation when the slave, Caesar, and the master, Henry, exchange costumes and identities, even a situation that may radically suggest affinities between black and white rather than emphasize differences, ultimately fails

to delegitimize constructed distinctions. Cooper makes the reader privy to the masquerade, in which artifice obscures the "natural" facts of each man's identity. If any resemblance between the heroic white soldier and the subservient black man arises, it is merely the effect of Cooper's unnatural stratagem. It is notable that in other scenes where race is not a factor, Cooper expresses no scruple about duping the reader with disguises, making the reader occupy a position of ignorance, permitting him or her to see past the ruse no sooner than any of the astonished characters. In this instance of racial cross-dressing, however, by letting the reader know a masquerade will occur, the text removes the possibility of any confusion that could cause an obfuscation of the "real" distinctions between master and slave. Whereas Mark Twain employs racial cross-dressing in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* to interrogate the imposition of arbitrary categorizations, Cooper's intent lies elsewhere. The man who wrote "Slavery may actually benefit a man, there being little doubt that the African is, in nearly all respects, better off in servitude" would not question the prevailing racial hierarchy.<sup>40</sup> And even if Cooper wanted Caesar to articulate an indictment of race slavery, Washington's silence on the question of slavery would refuse him authorization to do so.

Despite its title, *The Spy* engages in hardly any covert ideological action. Still, because of his conception of the American public as often unthinking and usually misdirected, Cooper doubted that his readers had understood the messages encoded in his fiction. Deeming it necessary to spell out his thoughts on the American republic, Cooper interrupted his career as a novelist. In 1838 he published *The American Democrat* as an unequivocal commentary on civic life in the United States. The democratic gentleman, whom Cooper took as his own self-image, stands as the hero of this treatise. Central to his definition of democracy is an explanation of the functioning of authority. The principal lesson Americans needed to learn, Cooper believed, was that authority does not and should not lie with the people. Apprehensive of "an unauthorized publick" that nevertheless considered itself justly endowed with the power of popular opinion, Cooper wrote against what he perceived as a democracy's natural tendency toward radicalism. When he looked at the Revolution in *The Spy*, he charted the fortunes of an aristocratic family who mingle only with characters of equal station. Cooper revised the Revolution as a novel

of manners, rescuing history and his reading public from the "madness" of abolition sentiments. Washington's actions in the novel do not just preserve a family, his paternal authority protects ladies and gentlemen whose foresight to remove to a secluded country manor backfires when the battle shifts to the neutral ground outside their front door. The commander-in-chief's converse with a mere peddler is justified not only by military necessity, but by the inherent nobility of Harvey Birch, who often sighs with pretensions to a Byronic loneliness of soul. Military discipline and class status, heavily emphasized in the novel, reinforce the American chain of being, with the paterfamilias at the top and the black slave at the bottom. According to *The American Democrat*, "men of really high social station" perceive that a democracy based upon law, not on shifting public opinion, preserves the status quo. Gentlemen do not crudely read the American promises of freedom and equality as prescriptive statements; instead, they understand the finer point that the "celebrated proposition contained in the declaration of independence is not to be understood literally. All men are not 'created equal' . . . since one has a good constitution, another a bad; one is handsome, another ugly; one white, another black." Cooper's representation of authority in this tract culminates in the same hierarchical vision as that expressed in both *The Spy* and a racialized reading of Winthrop's *Model of Christian Charity*. Relying on scriptural "truths" about relations between master and servant, Cooper structured his interpretation of American society around patriarchal authority and thus could assert: "It is quite possible to be an excellent christian and a slave holder."<sup>41</sup>

Negotiations between Cooper and the cultural text of Washington figure as a synecdoche in which issues of authority, closure, and race found in *The Spy* represent fictional strategies for sorting out these issues within the narrative of America. Black Daddy is securely positioned by his serving tray, and Caesar is continually harried by racist ascriptions of cowardice and servility; however, America would soon undermine the narrative and patriarchal governance that kept such unruly ideological bodies in place. Exertions of patriarchal memory, though designed to assuage conflict, were infused with irony: repetitions of founding narratives were not exact, but involved a critical supplementing of the nation with prefaces.<sup>42</sup> Citizens as diversely minded as Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis theorized that closure, either as union or division, would appear, not

by following the nation to its ending, but by remembering its beginnings. Only a return to national foundations could provide final moral authority because so putatively perfect were those origins that they already contained the wisdom of their own conclusion, just as Cooper knew his novel would end with Washington's signature even before he had finished it. Likewise, in Uncle Juvinnell's bedtime story, the farmer boy does not slowly mature and change into the commander in chief; his boyhood is narrativized as an unquestionable premonition of greatness. Resolution for sectional conflict lay at the beginnings, yet all that descended from those beginnings—Jefferson's slave children, Washington's equivocal legacy, the expansion of slavery, and political compromise—exerted a supplemental force that could not be reconciled in any coherent ending for the national narrative.

While the nation labored to be "borne back ceaselessly into the past," to invoke F. Scott Fitzgerald, it aggressively contradicted its temporal odyssey with a territorial imperative that promised continental closure in a future of conquest and expansion. As America annexed the promised land in the name of Manifest Destiny, contradictions of freedom and bondage latent in Washington's biography became even more apparent, and debates as to whether that promised land would be admitted to the Union as free or slave states grew harder to contain. Adding to the nation may have sounded victorious cries in the halls of Montezuma, but it also incited interrogations like that of fugitive slave Samuel Ringgold Ward, who charged: "The war with Mexico was conceived and brought forth, on purpose to lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes of slavery."<sup>43</sup> A narrative such as *The Spy*, or even the nation's narrative, that had freely circulated in 1821, found itself restricted by uncontrollable contradictions by the 1850s. The original text, whether Cooper's historical romance or the American union, forfeited ideological coherence as prefaces responding to race slavery—author's introductions and congressional compromises—undercut the ability of narrative to stand alone. Both Cooper's 1849 introduction and the Compromise of 1850 prefaced original narratives as a response to a growing awareness that these narratives of historical romance and historical nation needed further explanation and support. Foundational texts no longer stood inviolate in the security of their own declarations. Informed by contradictory motives, these prefaces im-

plied a frailty and lack of authority within original patriarchal narratives in what proved an ironic attempt to bolster the texts of the fathers.

What afflicted the coherence of narrative was not so much actual contention in the political arena, but the narrative itself, splintered into preface and text. Jacques Derrida's commentary on the subversiveness of the preface can help us to explore further this tension within narrative. Derrida suggests that a filial relation like that of father and son exists between text and preface because the preface is always sired by the text after its completion. Even as the preface pays homage to the text, it is seized by an Oedipal urge and questions the text's self-sufficiency, insinuating doubts about the father's authority in which it originated. In other words, because of its very existence, the preface as son questions the ability of the text as father to stand alone. Sustaining the father, the preface implies an act of parricide. Returning for a moment to *The Farmer Boy*, we see that even a good-natured and innocent text can harbor the parricidal preface. Thayer's introduction, which commends the text as "so well adapted to the exigencies of the times," simultaneously works at cross purposes to Uncle Juvenell's stories. Published while "our nation is groaning and travailing in pain to bring forth a future," *The Farmer Boy* strives to recollect a prosperous union; however, this memorial rite uncomfortably juxtaposes past and present, creating a comparison that was mired in the anguish of the country's looming dismemberment.<sup>44</sup> The generative processes of the founding father have degenerated into national abortion. Tales of Washington engendered a community of malleable, youthful citizens, but Thayer's preface rebels against this scene of political contentment by ripping the narrative from its framework of a comfortable Kentucky home and thrusting it into a context of an American community at war with itself, unheeding of Washington's pleas for union.

In a similar manner, *The Spy's* narrative authority maintained its hierarchical vision without incident—until the 1849 edition introduced a preface. In that year, surrounded by debates and events that would lead to passage of the Fugitive Slave Law and the Compromise of 1850 as well as to John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, *The Spy* initiated an insurrection against itself. A narrative that was coherent in 1821 found itself struggling to contain the self-wrought division of a parricidal revolt of preface against text. Paying homage

to an America he had seen expand and strengthen since *The Spy's* original 1821 publication, Cooper reaffirmed the narrative of the republic, rededicating himself with zeal to the national mission. Indeed, he claimed, the recent triumph over Mexico should have granted every American a full store of patriotic confidence, with recollections of "guns that filled the valley of the Aztecs with their thunder" (xii). The victor's spoils, however, sparked national debate as it came time to determine if slavery should extend to these new territories. The effort to resolve the issue returned America to a futile search of the founding fathers for some authoritative directive regarding slavery. Unable to find any instruction, America wrote the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Law as prefaces that supplemented (and thus doubted) narratives of the nation's origin. Immediately after reveling in the national glory of the Mexican-American War, Cooper's introduction moves toward its conclusion, and yet closure remains far off in the romantic distance of the Revolutionary past. Cooper writes: "There is now no enemy to fear, but the one that resides within" (xiii). No foreigners threatened America; only the spies of its own ideological contradictions could act as insurgents within the authoritative narrative of Washington.

Even more incendiary than Reverend Thayer's unintentional subversion of Uncle Juvenell in *The Farmer Boy*, Cooper's 1849 supplement fosters doubts about its predecessor even as it pays respects to its textual father. This filial rebellion of preface against text permits an understanding of narrative beyond psychological interpretation. It provides insight into the peculiar political situation of the post-Revolutionary sons, struggling to expound interpretations of slavery that would be consistent with the legacy of the founding fathers. In this way, then, problematics of father and son, text and preface, cease to be understood as purely textual matters confined to historical novels and biographies. The preface's insurgency occurs within a larger field of discursive contestation involving the narration of patriarchal authority integral to American politics and culture. At stake is nothing less than the structure, coherence, and consistency of America's articulation of its past. Remembering that the preface is always born after the origination of the text, American history can be read, not along chronological lines, but along lines of textuality where issues of race, containment, and power come to the forefront. Thus, the original text of America that was declared to have begun

in 1776 did not precede the 1850s embattled by guilt over race slavery. Rather, the 1850s, composed after that original text, are properly the preface. Disregard for the chronology of national history no doubt overturns notions of order and causality, but what now appears is a glimpse at the workings of power, strife, and negotiation that inform any narrative. As preface to the originary articulations of 1776, the 1850s unsettled the national narrative. Irreconcilable debates over slavery, even works like the Compromise of 1850 and the Dred Scott decision that seemed committed to preserving the memory of the founding fathers, nonetheless bear a critical relation to the original text of freedom that inspired the American narrative in the first place. Slavery, itself stemming from patriarchal authority, rebels against the fathers who found freedom in its shadow. American narrative, disgusted by its return to the fleshpots of oppression and injustice, revolts against itself, splintering into preface and text.

The preface need not work critically, however. Its supplemental commentary is liable, according to Derrida, "to be reappropriated into the sublimity of the father," and it is this patriarchal containment that appeases marginal and excessive figures such as Black Daddy and Caesar. After all, the patriotic and moralistic tones of the prefaces to *The Farmer Boy* and *The Spy* evince the sublimity of national narrative, making it at first difficult to say if doubts about the antebellum present (which is also the textual occasion for these belated appendices) instill a subversive lack of confidence or if uneasy allusions to instabilities in the narrative frame ultimately are assuaged by the traditional closure of national narrative. Derrida's description of the father's facility in "mastering his seed" seems to remove these doubts, recording how the preface often drops its critical impetus and carries out the text's designs. But a purely textual account nonetheless takes on added historical valence when translated to the antebellum context: narratives of Washington are thoroughly yet conflictually committed to this "mastering," whether it is correcting the rascal Jerry or filling the lacunae in Cooper's foundational fiction. The figure of Washington works narratively to domesticate the excessiveness of race, to bring unruly slaves back within the patriarchal household as well as to disarm unseemly prefatory asides to the crisis over slavery. The historical extension of Derrida's formulation becomes a dangerous sexual and political postscript when it is remembered that his "mastering" is transitive, acted out upon "his seed."<sup>45</sup>

Although no intimations of Jeffersonian miscegenation attached themselves to Washington, and assuredly Jerry is not young George's kin, in terms of national narrative, his legacy of nonaction and ambiguity engendered a filial generation that sorely needed his fabled guidance. In the context of a nation founded upon democracy and slavery, Washington's legacy of mastery is ambivalent; his authority, as textual figure, cannot evade its own history of a compromised racial inheritance. Hoping to dispel these contradictions and make coherent the legacies that uncertainly validated their own political existence, the sons produced legal decisions, congressional acts, biographies, and historical romances that worked at cross-purposes, retelling stories of the father's authority while reproducing the circumstances that undercut that authority.

Although America continually returned to honor the originary text of its history, such a move undermined that history's authority. Prefacing foundational fictions with fictive resolutions for social ills that descended from the original fathers, the sons of the American Renaissance instigated a textual rebellion of monumental dimension. Even a statesman sworn to uphold the design of the fathers might conceive of national origins in ways that radically disfigured their imagined political purity. A few months before troops fired upon Fort Sumter, Lincoln penned a fragment that interpreted the Constitution as the preface to the Declaration of Independence. The fathers' belated commentary in 1789 to their own founding in 1776 makes dubious any claim for national consistency; parricide as national-textual supplement began with the fathers themselves. Seemingly a gesture of concern and homage, a document designed "to adorn, and preserve" the Declaration, in Lincoln's formulation, the Constitution ironically endangers "the principle of 'Liberty to all,'" threatening "to conceal, or destroy" what the fathers themselves had promised.<sup>46</sup> Arguing that the Constitution provides a supplement to the Declaration of Independence, the president-elect formulated a critical understanding of the nation as divisive and conflicted at its origin. Reexamination of democratic origins, as Lincoln would so dramatically discover in the next four years, sets in motion a genealogical search for origins that disrupts not only beginnings but also endings, fissuring possibilities of closure. Reading the history of their fathers, American sons like Cooper and Calhoun, William Wells Brown and Abraham Lincoln, Uncle Juvinell and Herman Melville

had no choice but to amend and revise, to preface and supplement, in short, to interpret critically the legacy they had inherited. The narrative bequeathed by the fathers seemed riddled with irreconcilable contradictions between promise and praxis; it was a narrative that in its retelling demanded a preface, an amendment, to make proper adjustment for the social actualities of the present. And although some necessary and proper amendments were not publicly ratified until after Reconstruction, the cultural crisis of the 1850s stood as a preface voicing serious reservations about the narrative from which America descended. The 1850s descended from the glorious days of 1776, but the debates, fiction, and biography generated during the antebellum years articulate an insurrectionary preface to the ideals promulgated by the founding fathers. As writers and politicians remembered the original inception of the Union, they both inadvertently and intentionally authored a subversive filial rebellion questioning the very tradition from which they had nevertheless derived their authority. No matter how laudatory or affirmative its inspiration, no matter what body bore the national fiction, American historical remembering foundered in its attempt to apply fatherly authority to silence the rebellion that unacknowledged textual and racial sons instigated.

No work of the post-revolutionary period better prefaces the history of 1776 than Melville's *Moby-Dick*, which does violent homage to the founding father with the comparison that "Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed." This last sentence, however, is merely a preface to the argument of the next chapter.