

# The Necessity of Emotion in the Creation of the American Text

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During the first decades of the nineteenth century, the United States rapidly expanded its geographical borders. This growing country produced a fresh supply of American writers that lived a generation away from those who considered themselves citizens of distant empire. These authors were part of a truly new writing community, and the seemingly limitless landscape provided ample room for this new wave of native born writers to move away from the founding template of their creative tradition: traditional European forms of storytelling.

The change to a uniquely American text started centuries earlier, when the first colonies were awash with foundational social, economic, and political change. These transformative forces combined with imported traditional European narratives to create an artistic tradition that included more emotional content than its European predecessor (Coffin 246). The antebellum American painters, novelists, and singers built additional layers onto this emotional content; layers drawn out of the country they were born in, to enhance the narrative of their texts, and as they did they moved the American literary tradition farther away from the impassive narrative of its European ancestors.

The roots of this new creative identity are found a century earlier, when the fledgling colonies were full of the energy and tension that came from breaking away from an empire. These transformative forces merged with imported traditional European narratives to gradually start adding emotional content to the songs and stories carried by the colonists on their passage to their new home (Coffin 246).

During the antebellum period, this need to add emotional content continued to grow. American painters experimented with the emotionally charged lighting of luminism, folk singers added local details of tragedy and celebration to transplanted European ballads, and American authors, seizing on the passion and violence that permeated their surroundings, created characters that required the addition of a strong emotional dynamic in order for them to be complete. This massive influx of emotion put many of these characters, particularly the male characters, onto a trajectory that redefined them away from being just the standard-bearing representatives of European objective masculinity.

As a way of looking at this emotionally enhanced creative tradition of antebellum American authors, I will use examples from James Fenimore Cooper's historical novel *The Last of the Mohicans*, along with the lyrics of two transplanted American ballads, to weave an intertextual analysis of the emotional forces at play during the creation of the American novel.

We will start with Cooper, and when his novel begins we find ourselves right in the midst of the frontier violence of the French and Indian War. However, it is not the political details of the war that are important in the novel, it is the fact that Cooper's story needs a narrative backdrop of violence; violence that is not restricted by the rules of any particular culture or country. This setting is no

surprise, since Cooper wrote his book while living in a country full of the fresh memories of a war recently fought against its own founding empire. Being born in 1789, Cooper was a young man during the War of 1812, and with his passion for reading (Cooper v-vi) he must have followed the violent narrative of this war in the popular press. Cooper was also living in an era trying to deal with the violence born from the failure of the forced assimilation of a displaced, indigenous population. Any artist, living in a world saturated by these harsh social factors, would include the accompanying violence either consciously, or unconsciously, in any painting, song, or novel they create.

As a way of expressing the tension of his violent and transformative surroundings, Cooper's books tend to be adventure stories, but he decided to move the setting of one of his most popular novels, *The Last of the Mohicans*, into a period of time that far preceded its writing (Cooper v). This makes the novel a work of historical fiction, and the cultural traditions the novel portrays, particularly those of Cooper's Indian population, must be thought of only as fictional. However, Cooper also found it necessary to fill the novel with many references to music. What would prompt an author to include such an emotional form of expression as part of a fictional narrative of colonial violence?

I would assert that Cooper did this because his text portraying the events of a distant past, being written deep in the landscape of a country under stress, would emotionally romanticize the narrative that surrounds the real facts of their genesis. Thinking about the recent past is an emotional experience. Fresh memories of triumph and tragedy dredge up profound feelings of nostalgia. Loss, love, celebration, and mourning are amplified by a short span of time, and in a changing country, with only a short period of rest between its many violent conflicts, these feelings would be included as part of any text, regardless of how far back it is situated; and music is one of the best ways to include emotion in any text.

It is my assertion that it was during the American antebellum period, when authors started amplifying the discourse of emotion into their own fictional narratives, is when the uniquely American novel was born. This American novel is not simply a combination of the narrative and the emotional; it is a synthesis of both forms of artistic expression. The end result of this process is a new genre of narrative-emotional storytelling that survived right through the folk music revival and coffee house poetry movement that dominated the popular culture of the 1960's. The participants in this folk revival may have believed they were part of a new cultural experience, but they owe a great debt to the struggles that played out between the narrative storytelling style of Europe and the emotionally charged complexities of the emerging United States, and this same struggle between narration and emotion runs straight through the center of Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans*.

The early settlers in North America did not arrive in the colonies as empty containers. They carried inside them the narrative of centuries of European tradition. Music was large part of this transported tradition, and in New England the early colonists sang, and listened to, "a vast heritage of British and Irish melodies and lyrics, dance tunes, marches, and sacred songs" (Scott 1).

At this point in this essay we will focus on Scott's use of the word sacred, and to do so we must turn to the character in *The Last of the Mohicans* that serves us best in this regard, and that is the psalmist David Gamut. He is the first character we meet in the novel, and after a brief historical narrative of the French and Indian War, Cooper drops him right in the middle of this violent clash of empires (Cooper 6). This makes Gamut a man who enters our awareness as a character completely without context or any explanation of origin. He is not part of the narrative that precedes him; he is man "who, by his countenance and actions, formed a marked exception to those who composed the latter class of spectators" (6). All we know about this strange individual is that he is a singer. With the abruptness of this introduction, Cooper is making it clear that music must be included as part of his fictional historical narrative.

Cooper goes to great lengths to give us a vivid description David Gamut's appearance. He is an individual who clearly does not fit in this new and conflicted landscape. Even his physical appearance is a conundrum. When he stands up he is "erect, his stature surpassed that of his fellows; seated, he appeared reduced within the ordinary limits of the race" (6). Gamut is also a man "having broader foundations on which this false superstructure of the ended human orders was so profanely reared" (6). He is a combination of the shape of the typical human form and the gaudy extremes of its possible variations. Gamut is obviously a man, since he fits the basic narrative of the human shape, but he is out of proportion and ungainly, and his confusing stature lends itself more to the emotional nature of the human condition than his narrative shape. He is the embodiment of the fixed form of European narration and the shifting vagaries of American emotionalism brought to life by Cooper.

Gamut is confusing in another way. He is first introduced to the reader as part of a group of soldiers, yet he carries no weapon. However, he does carry an instrument. We learn later in the novel that this is a pitch pipe, a device he uses for worship by psalmody, but at this point in the novel all we know is that the object in his pocket "being seen in such martial company, might have been easily mistaken for some mischievous and unknown implement of war" (6).

Placed in historical context this instrument could indeed be considered a weapon. The singing of psalms in American has a troubled and violent past, and throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Europeans that settled in North America used psalms to try and convert the local Native American population to Christianity (Goodman 795). Psalmody, or singing psalms as an act of worship, has to be performed in a specific way to make the words as understandable as possible: "In English psalmody tunes are sung with one syllable per pitch to maximize the intelligibility of the text" (808). With this form of worship, it was more important to sing in a way that expressed the narrative of the psalm than to create an artistic, emotional interpretation of the story behind the words. The lyrics had to be understood for the psalm to be effective. It was simple rote, narrative learning that came from a leader singing one line of text and the congregation parroting back the words of the psalm to the leader (802).

During this period of well-intended indigenous religious conversion, the settlers quickly ran into a problem when the fixed and familiar English musical template used by the early New England psalm singers did not translate into the different native languages used by the Native Americans (812). Since the words of the psalms had to be understood for the psalm to be effective, each psalm had to be re-worded into local Native American languages, and this change of lyrics forced changes to the familiar syllable based musical meter of the existing psalms. This modification led to the creation of a new musical structure referred to as “Indian Meter” (814). This was a musical term coined by the psalmists, and it came to “refer to the changes in the text-music relationships in Indian Psalmody that altered the way musical time was marked” (814). Even in the early days of New England, the traditional narrative musical style of psalmody, transported to the colonies from England, had to be altered to fit the new American landscape. The sacred had become editable, albeit with the best of intentions, simply because the indigenous population had to know the meaning of the words for the psalms to be successful tools of religious conversion.

This program of conversion did not end well, and when the relationship between the colonists and the Native Americans regressed into violent conflict these same “Indian Meter” psalms were sung in loud and fierce voices prior to attacks on the colonists (817-18). At this point, not only has the text of the traditional psalms changed, but the altered texts have been infused with emotion. The colonists came to fear these translated psalms when they were sung in words they could not understand, and the attacking native population must have capitalized on this fear as a necessary tool of psychological warfare.

Gamut would have been aware of the troubled history that arose from changing the psalms traditional musical meter. His primary text for psalmody is the “*six-and-twentieth edition, promulgated at Boston, Anno Domini 1744; and is entitled, The Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs of the Old and New Testaments; faithfully translated into English Metre, for the Use, Edification, and Comfort of the Saints, especially in New England*” (Cooper 15).

Just as American psalmody went through both narrative and emotional transformation, Gamut personifies these same changes during the course of Cooper’s novel. At first, he is an educated man, but a man of singular dimension, for “no syllable of rude verse has ever profaned [his] lips” (15). Gamut sees no reason to learn anything new: “I follow no other than my own high vocation, which is instruction in sacred music!” (48); it is obvious at the beginning of the novel that Gamut is only singing psalms to invoke the narrative past. He is the voice of tradition, particularly for the novel’s main character, Hawkeye. When hearing Gamut sing, he “felt his iron nature subdued, while his recollection was carried back to boyhood, when his ears had been accustomed to listen to similar sounds of praise, in the settlements of the colony” (48-49).

At first, Gamut is resistant to change. He is a firm believer in the sanctity of the psalms, and he only sings them in the context of their original purpose: to comfort those around him and for purposes of worship. He even uses the required hand gestures to keep his proper English meter in line (16). But it is not

long before Gamut's psalms have to change to fit their new surroundings, and as they change he becomes the character who illustrates the transformation of the European fictional text of straight narrative into the emotionally charged fiction of the United States.

The first dramatic change in Gamut's singing style comes after his horse is killed and he sings part of a psalm as a sad lament to mourn the animal's passing (41). Gamut's horse is no ordinary horse. At the beginning of the novel, we learn that he believes his horse is from England (7). Nostalgia has crept into Gamut's singing. Emotion is starting to be attached to the sacred narrative of his psalms.

Later in Cooper's novel, Gamut has to deal with the horrors of coming face to face with the extreme violence of civilian slaughter, and when he does so he assumes that the words of the psalms can save him with their divine power. Gamut turns to the narrative power of the psalms for protection, but the narrative fails, and emotion wins the day. This victory occurs during the surrender of fort William Henry. Gamut's group is ferociously attacked, along with retreating English forces and civilians, and during this turbulent scene Gamut's psalms change from being a narrative that is passive and protective into a song that is emotionally assertive and powerful. When death appears to be imminent, Gamut decides to sing a psalm to protect himself and those around him from the attacking Indians: "If the Jewish boy might tame the great spirit of Saul by . . . the words of a sacred song, it may not be amiss . . . to try the potency of music here" (164). Saul and David spoke the same language, and there would be no difficulty with each understanding the words of the other. Gamut, in his blind faith, is trusting only in the sound of the psalms for protection. This is important, because according to the tenants of psalmody the power of the psalm is found in the words, and not in the meter of the music (Goodman 800), but during the attack Gamut decides to convert his psalm to a sonic weapon when he "exerted all his powers to extend what he believed so holy an influence" (Cooper 164).

Gamut may not realize it, but his psalm is protecting him only because he singing it in an emotional manner. This happens when he gives up the standard hand movements that accompany the singing of the psalms and resorts to "sweeping the air to the measure, with his long arm, in diligent accompaniment" (164-165). Most of his attackers can't understand a word he is singing, and it is his confusing and emotionally amplified behavior alone that seems to work in preventing him from being slaughtered. By the end of the battle, Gamut is transformed into a man who "appeared to the astonished natives gifted with the protecting spirit of madness" (165). The Indian attackers see Gamut's heightened emotional state as the shield that provides his protective power, and not the words of his psalm. This scene turns the traditional power behind the psalm on its head. It is not the content of the words that Gamut sings that provide the divine power of protection; it is the emotional passion of the singer. Emotion has trumped narrative, even with the holy word of God.

Gamut is eventually forced to live with a group of hostile Indians, and when placed in these dire straits he allows his psalms to leave the realm of the holy and become part of an elaborate escape plan. This happens when he sings a

psalm not to comfort, but to trick the family of a dying woman (Cooper 236). By the time we reach the end of Cooper's novel, Gamut's book of psalms has been reduced from a volume of holy songs into a simple collection of narratives described as a "little volume, which contained so many quaint but holy maxims" (318).

However, as the narrative power of the psalms decreases, Gamut's emotional content increases, and he eventually comes to understand the power of emotion that can be conveyed along with the narration of any song. This transformation changes Gamut into a man who understands the necessity of attaching emotion to a narrative. This transformation reaches its completion during the funeral scene in the novel's final chapter, when Gamut listens to the unintelligible, yet highly emotional, funeral dirge of the Delewares: "Even David [Gamut] was not reluctant to lend his ears to the tones of voices so sweet; and long ere the chant was ended, his gaze announced that his soul was enthralled" (Cooper 321). Gamut is now a man that understands that the emotion conveyed by a song can also have a profound impact on a person's soul, and not just the words being sung. The emotional power of music has become universal in Cooper's novel, and Gamut's respect for the singing of the Indians is so complete that he respectfully waits until they are finished singing their burial songs before lowering his voice to a whisper and reminds Cora's father of the importance of including Christian tradition as part of the funeral of his daughter (323). During Cora Munro's funeral, Gamut sings his last song as a man who has learned a great lesson, and that lesson is that his psalms have become one part of a larger musical tradition, a tradition that started as narration but needed the emotional injection of the lamenting funeral songs of Cooper's fictional Indian culture to become complete.

With his fictional Indian culture, Cooper also creates a group of people who consider singing, and speaking, textually the same experience, and both of these modes of communication carry deep, spiritual meaning. We learn this before Gamut sings his final psalm at the burial of Cora Munroe. The Indian Chief Tamenund calls for silence so Gamut can speak the words of Christian worship, even though he knows that Gamut will be singing his words (Cooper 324).

There is another important character that appears in Cooper's Indian culture of speak-song, and he is Gamut's nemesis, the fierce Indian warrior Magua. He is the second character we meet in Cooper's novel. It is important to note that the names of Gamut and Magua contain the same letters, with one telling and very important exception. Magua's name needs an extra "a" to make it complete, while the name of Gamut is completed with the letter "t". This single letter change can easily be explained away as Cooper's method of signifying Gamut as being a Christian, with the letter "t" representing the cross of his faith. Based on the ramifications of Gamut's emotional transformation, and on the actions of the other characters in Cooper's novel, I would disagree with this simple explanation. Hawkeye, the protagonist of the novel, likes to remind his opponents that he is a man without a cross (Cooper 247). Interestingly enough, by the end of

*The Last of the Mohicans*, Hawkeye has not changed as a character at all, and he ends the novel emotionally and culturally the same man who began it. The same could be said for his two companions, Uncas and Chingachgook.

Gamut is the only character who ends the book a fundamentally different person than when he starts it. This would make him the true hero of the tale, and the “t” that is necessary to complete his name symbolizes that Gamut possesses the cross that Hawkeye knows he does not have. To understand the cross of Gamut, you have to consider the “t” that separates his identity from that of Magua to be the cross of a plus sign. Gamut is a man who can be strengthened by education. In his journey, he learns that his identity can have things added to it, and Cooper lets Gamut use this ability to expand his own character to change him from a buffoonish singer who believes only in the enunciated straight narrative of the direct English Meter psalm into man who believes in the emotional power of music, regardless of its origin.

The important relationship between David Gamut and Magua does not end here, and the commonality of their names indicates that their lives get to intertwine in ways that the other characters in the novel never get to experience. Magua is the character that literally leads Gamut onto the path of his educational journey. Magua doesn’t seize Gamut when he kidnaps the daughters of Colonel Munroe; Gamut chooses to go with him (Cooper 164). Magua’s lyrical dialog within the speaking-singing tradition of Cooper’s Indian culture also makes him their version of a psalm singer, but he is a singer who already learned the emotional lessons that Gamut has yet to understand. Magua’s words can “strike every chord that might find, in its turn, some breast in which to vibrate” (Cooper 232). His oratory skills clearly match that of any master of psalmody. Cooper also tells us that Magua can speak in a way that “artfully blended the natural sympathies with the religious superstition” (233) of his culture, and this ability to blend narration and emotion makes Magua more similar to the mature Gamut than different.

Magua clearly knows the emotional impact of a well-sung song, but his emotional musical education came about earlier in his life through pain and humiliation and not by witnessing the actions of others. The emotion that drives the singing of Magua is revenge, while Gamut’s emotionally guiding force is redemption and mourning. This may make them opposites, but their emotional intensity is the same. For both these men the spoken word is a powerful tool, and they both use it to great advantage. It is Magua’s emotional soliloquy before the Indian Chief Talemund that convinces the chief to let Magua take Cora Munroe to lead a new life as an Indian. Later in the novel, it is Gamut’s turn to carry out the same function, and his emotionally charged psalm at her burial precedes the release of her soul from the grave and into the afterlife.

Magua’s emotional narrative comes from a fierce warrior who believes he deserves his spoils of battle, but Gamut’s psalm comes from a man who has learned the cathartic power of an emotional song. With his reliance on revenge, Magua has to die in the novel, but with his belief in redemption Gamut gets to live. Gamut chose to add emotion to his own narrative tradition and become

a complete individual. He represents the idealized citizen of the early United States while Magua, a man full of the fixed narrative of a traditionally violent society, is its past.

While each of these two men use their versions of holy music to create the lyrical backbone that runs through *The Last of the Mohicans*, there are situations in the novel that bring to the fore elements of traditional ballad singing in the early United States. Perhaps the book that is considered the definitive text documenting the original English narrative ballads is *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* by Professor Francis J. Child. There is historical evidence that some of the ballads found in this book became part of the musical tradition of The United States (Smith 109-110). Two of them in particular, “The Twa Sisters”, and “Bonny Barbara Allen”, have lyrics relevant with our intertextual discussion of *The Last of the Mohicans*. Like Gamut in Cooper’s novel, in their American versions these two ballads changed from a standardized European narrative style into a ballad that relies more on emotion to tell their story.

While Cooper does not mention either of these songs in his novel, based on his use of Scottish characters we can assume that he was aware of the first of these two songs, the Scottish ballad *The Twa Sisters*. In Child’s book there are multiple versions of this ballad, some dating back to the seventeenth century (Child 10), and in Europe they all have a similar narrative style and similar ending. In the original ballad there are two sisters, one who has dark hair and the other has fair hair. In Cooper’s novel we have the two sisters Cora and Alice. Cora has “tresses . . . shining and black”, and Alice has “fair golden hair” (Cooper 9). In the Scottish ballad the two sisters are the daughters of royalty, or of a wealthy man, but in Cooper’s novel, instead of being the daughters of Scottish nobility, the two daughters are the children of an American counterpart to royalty, Colonel Munro. He certainly would have known the ballad, being a character originally from Scotland (147). However, in the Scottish version of the ballad, the darker sister is a murderer, and in a fit of jealousy she kills her fairer younger sister (Child 10). This murder does not happen in Cooper’s text. By bringing the sisters and their father out of Scotland and into a land of new opportunity and traditions Cooper decides to take advantage of this transition to make the darker daughter sympathetic and heroic. A new nation, created under the banner of liberty and bursting with foundational emotion, needs more sympathetic folk traditions, even if they are rooted in the stories of the past. In Cooper’s new America, sisters don’t murder each other.

The switch from the narrative to the emotional is also found in the way the ending of the song “The Twa Sisters” changes when it becomes part of the American folk tradition. In the original Scottish version the song is presented as a straight narrative of murder and justice. The dark sister drowns the fair sister, and the body of the victim floats down to the bank of the pond. Eventually, time and the elements bleach the victim’s bones, and they are found by a passing musician who then turns them into an instrument. When the instrument is played it sings out the identity of the murderer. The killer is then typically hunted down and executed (Child 10).



The same ballad is commonly sung in the United States to this day, but in the American version of the song there is an emotional resolution. The passing musician still finds the remains of the victim and creates an instrument from her bones, but the instrument will only play one song, a song of great grief and lamentation. The tune it plays never mentions the murderer. The ballad's climax is now emotional, and not narrative.

The other ballad that fits into the story of *The Last of the Mohicans*, "Bonny Barbara Allen," was known to be sung in the antebellum period of the United States (Millican 303).

According to the original lyrics from *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* the song tells the story of a dying man who, on his death bed, calls for a visit from the lovely Barbara Allen (Child 84). The man wants to tell Barbara Allen that he loves her before he dies. Barbara Allen, however, does not care. She does not love the man back, and now that he is dying, does not want to even try. Compare this to Cooper's narrative of tragic tale of Uncas and Cora. In the text of Cooper's novel we get no indication that Cora has any feelings for Uncas, but we do get the distinct impression that Uncas is in love with Cora. He loves her so much he even gives up his life trying to save her from Magua. In the commonly sung American versions of "Bonny Barbara Allen" the last verse has the two characters from the ballad fall find love after death. These lyrics are attributed to an American version of this ballad dating back to 1845:

Out of his grave sprang a rose-bush,  
And out of hers a briar;  
They grew and wrapped in a true love-knot:  
The rose wrapped round the briar. (Millican 305)

The emotional ending to the once narrative ballad is just as moving as Cooper's implication that Uncas and Cora Munroe will always be together in death, even though they were never lovers in life.

I will end with this. When trying to identify any creative work as being uniquely an American text, you must first look for the specific elements that set it apart from its European ancestor. In my opinion, these elements are the underlying and visceral emotions that rise to the surface during rapid political change and violent conflict. These emotions are found within song lyrics, written on pages of text, and mixed into the colors painted onto canvases. That is where you will find the uniquely American spirit that cries when it hears a sad story, laughs when it sings a happy song, or sighs when it paints a softly illuminated river. The pulse of American literature is the emotional confluence of liberation, violence, astonishment, and wonder.

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Emotive concepts are viewed as representations of psychological and emotive aspects of language units functioning, as linguistic and cognitive realizations of emotive human I which is viewed as one of the projections of human language I and has ethnocultural (national) and sub-cultural (individually personal) levels of explication. Emotion is an experience which typically involves physiological arousal (the feeling of a change in the body state) and social display (the behavioural act of expressing affect). The figurative language used for describing emotional experiences is known as emotion. Emotions can be combined to form different feelings, much like colors can be mixed to create other shades. According to this theory, the more basic emotions act something like building blocks. The six basic emotions described by Eckman are just a portion of the many different types of emotions that people are capable of experiencing. Eckman's theory suggests that these core emotions are universal throughout cultures all over the world. However, other theories and new research continue to explore the many different types of emotions and how they are classified. Eckman later added a number of other emotions to his list but suggested that unlike his original six emotions, not all of these could necessarily be encoded through facial expressions. This Element focuses on emotions as intersubjective, collective and relational, and reviews structuralist, people-centered and strategic approaches to emotions in different research streams to provide one of the first broad examinations of emotions in organization theory. Charlene Zietsma, Maxim Voronov, Madeline Toubiana and Anna Roberts provide suggestions for future research within each literature and look across the literatures to identify theoretical and methodological considerations.