



THE NOVEL AS THEATER IN JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S *THE PILOT* (1823)

James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot: A Tale of the Sea* (1823), set during the American Revolution, is arguably one of the most influential novels, and with few peers, in all of American literature. Never before had an author so infatuated himself and his readers in the sea and sea faring matters; while introducing, at least for moderns, the notion of man against the elements. And in these regards, *The Pilot* vividly foreshadowed not only the nautical fiction of Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad, as has been already observed, but also that of Jack London and Ernest Hemingway. The ocean itself, with sky, sun, clouds, and stars as companions, is carefully delineated, described, and developed as if it too were a central character in the complex of *human* events.

Cooper himself effectively characterized his work as so many "rude sketches" (ch. 35), and, like some of his other novels, is not without its shortcomings, not least of which improbability of plot. Exactly what the mission of the American ships is and why they find themselves off the northern coast of England, and, *just coincidentally*, near St. Ruth's Abbey, the then abode of the love interests of three naval officers serving the American cause, i.e., Griffith (with Katherine Plowden), Barnstable (Cecilia Howard), and the pilot "John Gray" (Alice Dunscombe) is never very plausibly explained. It's a wonder that Cooper, who is so meticulously careful to dovetail and weave together the particulars of his story on so many points, should be guilty of such a conspicuous omission; and there are other and similar creaks in the story line. In addition, Cooper often has a convoluted, round about, and abstruse way of wording himself that will invariably will annoy a readers and who can't help at times finding themselves puzzled as to quite what he is talking about; all the more so when the point made is one that might otherwise have been made succinctly in a single sentence. Yet on the positive side, Cooper on other occasions has a knack for evoking moods very well, such as the feeling of being amid the tossing waves, and it is no little uncanny after putting the book down between readings to afterward feel oneself still imbued with the same.

The character of the book's title has been likened to John Paul Jones, indeed some critics assume the latter is on whom the mysterious Englishman "John Gray" is based. But this seems to be an error, or at best an over simplification, because John Gray is a persona unique and unlike almost anyone else we've seen. At times he seems to represent the true heart and spirit of the British naval tradition that spawned both British and American navies. At other times he is nationless wanderer seeking justice and adventure wherever there's a fight. At yet other, he acts as Providence itself dispensing to men their fate -- including perhaps even the outcome of the Revolutionary War itself. Moreover, we might add, Jones was not the first independent sailor to attempt fighting the British in their home waters, and had his antecedent in François Thurot, a privateer during the Seven Years War; Lambert Wickes, a Continental Navy captain from Maryland; and Irishman Gustavus Conyngham, "The Dunkirk Pirate."

And yet there is much more to *The Pilot* than its historical naval yarn, and Cooper spends almost as much time punctually tending to the tastes of the drawing room ladies, literati, scholars and historians as he does to the conventional action and romance reader. In fact in some parts Cooper uses *The Pilot* as a venue to display his interest in theater and his evidently closet aspiration to be a playwright as well as

novelist.¹ A perfect illustration of this last is chapter 28 which appears to be tailor and ready made to be adapted to the stage. There is much to love about this chapter; which viewed allegorically could be said to portray in abstract encapsulation the military struggle of the American Revolution, including references and allusions to the respective combatants most seminal motives and arguments. It was all a family quarrel pertaining in part to a dispute over women, Cooper says in effect. But perhaps even more interesting, indeed some will find a riot, are the theatrics, including suspense, he employs in presenting this denouement, and which give us a no little amusing glimpse of what many theater-goers of the early 19th century no doubt liked to see and hear in their stage dramas.

To set the scene, the Americans sailors under Griffith and Barnstable are preparing to liberate some prisoners by surprising British Capt. Borroughcliffe and his soldiers; unaware that the latter has himself secretly set a trap *for them*.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

“He looks abroad, and soon appears,  
O’er Horncliffe-hill, a plump of spears,  
Beneath a pennon gay.”

*Marmion.*<sup>2</sup>

The sharp sounds of the supper-bell were ringing along the gallery, a Miss Plowden gained the gloomy passage; and she quickened her steps to join the ladies, in order that no further suspicions might be excited by her absence. -- Alice Dunscombe was already proceeding to the dining parlor, as Katherine passed through the door of the drawing-room; but Miss Howard had loitered behind, and was met by her cousin alone.

“You have then been so daring as to venture, Katherine!” exclaimed Cecilia.

“I have,” returned the other, throwing herself into a chair, to recover her agitation -- “I have, Cecilia; and I have met Barnstable, who will soon be in the abbey, and its master.”

The blood which had rushed to the face of Cecilia on first seeing her cousin now retreated to her heart, leaving every part of her fine countenance of the whiteness of her polished temples, as she said:

“And we are to have a night of blood!”

“We are to have a night of freedom, Miss Howard; freedom to you, and to me: to Andrew Merry [an American midshipman and also cousin to the Cecilia Howard and Katherine Plowden], to Griffith and to his companion!”

“What freedom more than we now enjoy Katherine, is needed by two young women? Think you I can remain silent, and see my uncle betrayed before my eyes? his life perhaps endangered!”

“Your own life and person will not be held more sacred, Cecilia Howard, than that of your uncle. If you will condemn Griffith to a prison, and perhaps to a gibbet, betray Barnstable, as you have threatened -- an opportunity will not be wanting at the supper-table, whither I shall lead the way, since the mistress of the house appears to forget her duty.”

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper’s *The Spy* had been successfully produced for the stage; a performance of which has been memorialized in a painting by dramatist, painter, and stage historian William Dunlap.

<sup>2</sup> *Edit.* By Sir Walter Scott.

Katharine arose, and with a firm step and proud eye she moved along the gallery to the room where their presence was expected by the rest of the family. Cecilia followed in silence, and the whole party immediately took their several places at the board.

The first few minutes were passed in the usual attentions of the gentlemen to the ladies, and the ordinary civilities of the table; during which Katherine had so far regained the equanimity of her feelings, as to commence a watchful scrutiny of the manners and looks of her guardian and Borroughcliffe, in which she determined to persevere until the eventful hour when she was to expect Barnstable should arrive. Colonel Howard [retired British officer and caretaker of wards Cecilia and Katherine] had, however, so far got the command of himself, as no longer to betray his former abstraction. In its place Katherine fancied, at moments, that she could discover a settled look of conscious security, mingled a little with an expression of severe determination; such as, in her earlier days, she had learned to dread as sure indications of the indignant, but upright, justice of an honorable mind. Borroughcliffe, on the other hand, was cool, polite, and as attentive to the viands as usual, with the alarming exception of discovering much less devotion to the Pride of the Vineyards than he commonly manifested on such occasions. In this manner the meal passed by, and the cloth was removed, though the ladies appeared willing to retain their places longer than was customary. Colonel Howard, filling up the glasses of Alice Dunscombe and himself, passed the bottle to the recruiting officer, and, with a sort of effort that was intended to rouse the dormant cheerfulness of his guests, cried:

“Come Borroughcliffe, the ruby lips of your neighbors would be still more beautiful, were they moistened with this rich cordial, and that, too, accompanied by some loyal sentiment. Miss Alice is ever ready to express her fealty to her sovereign; in her name, I can give the health of his most sacred majesty, with defeat and death to all traitors!”

“If the prayers of an humble subject, and one of a sex that has but little need to mingle in the turmoil of the world, and that has less right to pretend to understand the subtleties of statesmen, can much avail a high and mighty prince like him who sits on the throne, then will he never know temporal evil,” returned Alice, meekly; “but I cannot wish death to any one, not even to my enemies, if any I have, and much less to a people who are the children of the same family with myself.”

“Children of the same family!” the colonel repeated, slowly, and with a bitterness of manner that did not fail to attract the painful interest of Katherine: “children of the same family! Ay! even as Absalom was the child of David, or as Judas was of the family of the holy Apostles! But let it pass unpledged -- let it pass. The accursed spirit of rebellion has invaded my dwelling, and I no longer know where to find one of my household that has not been assailed by its malign influence!”

“Assailed I may have been among others,” returned Alice; “but not corrupted, if purity, in this instance, consists in loyalty--”

“What sound is that?” interrupted the colonel, with startling suddenness. “Was it not the crash of some violence, Captain Borroughcliffe?”

“It may have been one of my rascals who has met with a downfall in passing from the festive board -- where you know I regale them to-night, in honor of our success--to his blanket,” returned the captain, with admirable indifference; “or it may be the very spirit of whom you have spoken so freely, my host, that has taken umbrage at your remarks, and is passing from the hospitable walls of St. Ruth into the open air, without submitting to the small trouble of ascertaining the position of doors. In the latter case there may be some dozen perches or so of wall to replace in the morning.”

The colonel, who had risen, glanced his eyes uneasily from the speaker to the door, and was evidently but little disposed to enter into the pleasantry of his guest.

“There are unusual noises, Captain Borroughcliffe, in the grounds of the abbey, if not in the building itself,” he said advancing with a fine military air from the table to the centre of the room, “and as

master of the mansion I will inquire who it is that thus unseasonably disturbs these domains. If as friends, they shall have welcome, though their visit be unexpected; and if enemies, they shall also meet with such a reception as will become an old soldier!"

"No, no," cried Cecilia, entirely thrown off her guard by the manner and language of the veteran and rushing into his arms. "Go not out, my uncle; go not into the terrible fray, my kind, my good uncle! you are old, you have already done more than your duty; why should you be exposed to danger?"

"The girl is mad with terror, Borroughcliffe," cried the colonel, bending his glistening eyes fondly on his niece, "and you will have to furnish my good-for-nothing, gouty old person with a corporal's guard, to watch my nightcap, or the silly child will have an uneasy pillow, till the sun rises once more. But you do not stir, sir?"

"Why should I?" cried the captain; "Miss Plowden yet deigns to keep me company, and it is not in the nature of one of the --th to desert his bottle and his standard at the same moment. For, to a true soldier, the smiles of a lady are as imposing in the parlor as the presence of his colors in the field."

"I continue undisturbed, Captain Borroughcliffe," said Katherine, "because I have not been an inhabitant, for so many months, of St. Ruth, and not learned to know the tunes which the wind can play among its chimneys and pointed roofs. The noise which has taken Colonel Howard from his seat, and which has so unnecessarily alarmed my cousin Cicely, is nothing but the Æolian harp of the abbey sounding a double bass."

The captain fastened on her composed countenance, while she was speaking, a look of open admiration, that brought, though tardily, the color more deeply to her cheeks: and he answered with something extremely equivocal, both in his emphasis and his air:

"I have avowed my allegiance, and I will abide by it. So long as Miss Plowden will deign to bestow her company, so long will she find me among her most faithful and persevering attendants, come who may, or what will."

"You compel me to retire," returned Katherine, rising, "whatever may have been my gracious intentions in the matter; for even female vanity must crimson, at an adoration so profound as that which can chain Captain Borroughcliffe to a supper-table! As your alarm has now dissipated, my cousin, will you lead the way? Miss Alice and myself attend you."

"But not into the paddock, surely, Miss Plowden," said the captain; "the door, the key of which you have just turned, communicates with the vestibule. This is the passage to the drawing-room."

The lady faintly laughed, as if in derision of her own forgetfulness, while she bowed her acknowledgment, and moved towards the proper passage: she observed:

"The madness of fear has assailed some, I believe, who have been able to affect a better disguise than Miss Howard."

"Is it the fear of present danger, or of that which is in reserve?" asked the captain; "but, as you have stipulated so generously in behalf of my worthy host here, and of one, also, who shall be nameless, because he has not deserved such a favor at your hands, your safety shall be one of my especial duties in these times of peril."

"There is peril, then!" exclaimed Cecilia; "your looks announce it. Captain Borroughcliffe! The changing countenance of my cousin tells me that my fears are too true!"

The soldier had now risen also, and, casting aside the air of badinage, which he so much delighted in, he came forward into the centre of the apartment, with the manner of one who felt it was time to be serious.

“A soldier is ever in peril, when the enemies of his king are at hand, Miss Howard,” he answered: “and that such is now the case, Miss Plowden can testify, if she will. But you are the allies of both parties -- retire, then, to your own apartments, and await the result of the struggle which is at hand.”

“You speak of danger and hidden perils,” said Alice Dunscombe; “know ye aught that justifies your fears?”

“I know all,” Borroughcliffe coolly replied.

“All!” exclaimed Katherine.

“All!” echoed Alice, in tones of horror, “If, then, you know all, you must know his desperate courage, and powerful hand, when opposed -- yield in quiet, and he will not harm ye. Believe me, believe one who knows his very nature, that no lamb can be more gentle than he would be with unresisting women; nor any lion more fierce, with his enemies!”

“As we happen not to be of the feminine gender,” returned Borroughcliffe, with an air somewhat splenetic, “we must abide the fury of the king of beasts. His paw is, even now, at the outer door; and, if my orders have been obeyed, his entrance will be yet easier than that of the wolf to the respectable female ancestor of the little Red-riding-hood.”

“Stay your hand for one single moment!” said Katherine, breathless with interest; “you are the master of my secret, Captain Borroughcliffe, and bloodshed may be the consequence. I can yet go forward, and, perhaps, save many inestimable lives. Pledge to me your honor, that they who come hither as your enemies, this night, shall depart in peace, and I will pledge to you my life for the safety of the abbey,”

“Oh! hear her, and shed not human blood!” cried Cecilla.

A loud crash interrupted further speech, and the sounds of heavy footsteps were heard in the adjoining room, as if many men were alighting on its floor, in quick succession. Borroughcliffe drew back, with great coolness, to the opposite side of the large apartment, and took a sheathed sword from the table where it had been placed; at the same moment the door was burst open, and Barnstable entered alone, but heavily armed.

“You are my prisoners, gentlemen,” said the sailor, as he advanced; “resistance is useless, and without it you shall receive favor. Ha, Miss Plowden! my advice was that you should not be present at this scene.”

“Barnstable, we are betrayed!” cried the agitated Katherine. “But it is not yet too late. Blood has not yet been spilt, and you can retire, without that dreadful alternative, with honor. Go, then, delay not another moment; for should the soldiers of Captain Borroughcliffe come to the rescue of their commander, the abbey would be a scene of horror!”

“Go you away; go, Katherine,” said her lover, with impatience; “this is no place for such as you. But, Captain Borroughcliffe, if such be your name, you must perceive that resistance is in vain. I have ten good pikes in this outer room, in twenty better hands, and it will be madness to fight against such odds.”

“Show me your strength,” said the captain, “that I may take counsel with mine honor.”

“Your honor shall be appeased, my brave soldier, for such is your bearing, though your livery is my aversion, and your cause most unholy! Heave ahead, boys! but hold your hands for orders.”

The party of fierce-looking sailors whom Barnstable led, on receiving this order, rushed into the room in a medley; but, notwithstanding the surly glances, and savage characters of their dress and equipments, they struck no blow, nor committed any act of hostility. The ladies shrank back appalled, as

this terrific little band took possession of the hall; and even Borroughcliffe was seen to fall back towards a door which, in some measure, covered his retreat. The confusion of this sudden movement had not yet subsided, when sounds of strife were heard rapidly approaching from a distant part of the building, and presently one of the numerous doors of the apartment was violently opened, when two of the garrison of the abbey rushed into the hall, vigorously pressed by twice their number of seamen, seconded by Griffith, Manual [commanding the American marines], and Merry, who were armed with such weapons of offence as had presented themselves to their hands, at their unexpected liberation. There was a movement on the part of the seamen who were already in possession of the room, that threatened instant death to the fugitives; but Barnstable beat down their pikes with his sword, and sternly ordered them to fall back. Surprise produced the same pacific result among the combatants; and as the soldiers hastily sought a refuge behind their own officers, and the released captives, with their liberators, joined the body of their friends, the quiet of the hall, which had been so rudely interrupted, was soon restored.

“You see, sir,” said Barnstable, after grasping the hands of Griffith and Manual in a warm and cordial pressure, “that all my plans have succeeded. Your sleeping guard are closely watched in their barracks by one party; our officers are released and your sentinels cut off by another; while, with a third, I hold the centre of the abbey, and am, substantially, in possession of your own person. In consideration, therefore, of what is due to humanity, and to the presence of these ladies, let there be no struggle! I shall impose no difficult terms, nor any long imprisonment.”

The recruiting officer manifested a composure throughout the whole scene that would have excited some uneasiness in his invaders, had there been opportunity for minute observation; but his countenance now gradually assumed an appearance of anxiety, and his head was frequently turned, as if listening for further and more important interruptions. He answered, however, to this appeal with his ordinary deliberation.

“You speak of conquests, sir, before they are achieved. My venerable host and myself are not so defenceless as you may chose to imagine.” While speaking he threw aside the cloth of a side table, from beneath which the colonel and himself were instantly armed with a brace of pistols each. “Here are the death-warrants of four of your party, and these brave fellows at my back can account for two more. I believe, my transatlantic warrior, that we are now something in the condition of Cortes and the Mexicans, when the former overran part of your continent -- I being Cortes, armed with artificial thunder and lightning, and you the Indians, with nothing but your pikes and sling, and such other antediluvian inventions. Shipwrecks and seawater are fatal dampers of gunpowder!”

“That we are unprovided with firearms, I will not deny,” said Barnstable; “but we are men who are used, from infancy, to depend on our good right arms for life and safety, and we know how to use them, though we should even grapple with death! As for the trifles in your hands, gentlemen, you are not to suppose that men who are trained to look in at one end of a thirty-two pounder, loaded with grape, while the match is put to the other, will so much as wink at their report, though you fired them by fifties. What say you, boys, is a pistol a weapon to repel boarders?”

The discordant and disdainful laughs that burst from the restrained seamen were a sufficient pledge of their indifference to so trifling a danger. Borroughcliffe noted their hardened boldness, and taking the supper bell, which was lying near him, he rang it, for a minute, with great violence. The heavy tread of trained footsteps soon followed this extraordinary summons; and presently the several doors of the apartment were opened, and filled with armed soldiers, wearing the livery of the English crown.

“If you hold these smaller weapons in such vast contempt,” said the recruiting officer, when he perceived that his men had possessed themselves of all the avenues, “it is in my power to try the virtue of some more formidable. After this exhibition of my strength, gentlemen, I presume you cannot hesitate to submit as prisoners of war.”

The seamen had been formed in something like military array, by the assiduity of Manual, during the preceding dialogue; and as the different doors had discovered fresh accessions to the strength of the

enemy, the marine industriously offered new fronts, until the small party was completely arranged in a hollow square, that might have proved formidable in a charge, bristled as it was with the deadly pikes of the Ariel.

“Here has been some mistake,” said Griffith, after glancing his eye at the formidable array of the soldiers; “I take precedence of Mr. Barnstable, and I shall propose to you, Captain Borroughcliffe, terms that may remove this scene of strife from the dwelling of Colonel Howard.”

“The dwelling of Colonel Howard,” cried the veteran, “is the dwelling of his king, or of the meanest servant of the crown! so, Borroughcliffe, spare not the traitors on my behalf; accept no other terms than such unconditional submission as is meet to exact from the rebellious subjects of the anointed of the Lord.”

While Griffith spoke, Barnstable folded his arms, in affected composure, and glanced his eyes expressively at the shivering Katherine, who, with her companions, still continued agitated spectators of all that passed, chained to the spot by their apprehensions; but to this formidable denunciation of the master of the abbey he deemed proper to reply:

“Now, by every hope I have of sleeping again on salt water, old gentleman if it were not for the presence of these three trembling females, I should feel tempted to dispute, at once, the title of his majesty. You may make such a covenant as you will with Mr. Griffith, but if it contain one syllable about submission to your king, or of any other allegiance than that which I owe to the Continental Congress, and the State of Massachusetts, you may as well consider the terms violated at once; for not an article of such an agreement will I consider as binding on me, or on any that shall choose to follow me as leader.”

“Here are but two leaders, Mr. Barnstable,” interrupted the haughty Griffith; “the one of the enemy, and the other of the arms of America. Captain Borroughcliffe, to you, as the former, I address myself. The great objects of the contest which now unhappily divides England from her ancient colonies can be, in no degree, affected by the events of this night; while, on the other hand, by a rigid adherence to military notions, much private, evil and deep domestic calamity must follow any struggle in such a place. We have but to speak, sir, and these rude men, who already stand impatiently handling their instruments of death, will aim them at each other’s lives; and who can say that he shall be able to stay their hands when and where he will. I know you to be a soldier, and that you are not yet to learn how much easier it is to stimulate to blood than to glut vengeance.”

Borroughcliffe, unused to the admission of violent emotions, and secure in the superiority of his own party, both in numbers and equipments, heard him with the coolest composure to the end, and then answered in his customary manner:

“I honor your logic, sir. Your premises are indisputable, and the conclusion most obvious. Commit then these worthy tars to the good keeping of honest Drill [i.e., the subaltern in command of Borroughcliffe’s soldiers], who will see their famished natures revived by divers eatables and a due proportion of suitable fluids; while we can discuss the manner in which you are to return to the colonies, around a bottle of liquor, which my friend Manual there assures me has come from the sunny side of the island of Madeira, to be drunk in a bleak corner of that of Britain. By my palate! but the rascals brighten at the thought. They know by instinct, sir, that a shipwrecked mariner is a fitter companion to a ration of beef and a pot of porter than to such unsightly things as bayonets and boarding-pikes!”

“Trifle, not unseasonably!” exclaimed the impatient young sailor. “You have the odds in numbers, but whether it will avail you much in a deadly struggle of hand to hand, is a question you must put to your prudence: we stand not here to ask terms, but to grant them. You must be brief, sir; for the time is wasting while we delay.”

“I have offered to you the means of obtaining, in perfection, the enjoyment of the three most ancient of the numerous family of the arts -- eating, drinking, and sleeping! What more do you require?”

“That you order these men, who fill the pass to the outer door, to fall back and give us room. I would take, in peace, these armed men from before the eyes of those who are unused to such sights. Before you oppose this demand, think how easily these hardy fellows could make a way for themselves, against your divided force.”

“Your companion, the experienced Captain Manual, will tell you that such a manoeuvre would be very unmilitary with a superior body in your rear!”

“I have not leisure, sir, for this folly,” cried the indignant Griffith. “Do you refuse us an unmolested retreat from the abbey?”

“I do.”

Griffith turned with a look of extreme emotion to the ladies, and beckoned to them to retire, unable to give utterance to his wishes in words. After a moment of deep silence, however, he once more addressed Borroughcliffe in the tones of conciliation.

“If Manual and myself will return to our prisons, and submit to the will of your government,” he said, “can the rest of the party return to the frigate unmolested?”

“They cannot,” replied the soldier, who, perceiving that the crisis approached, was gradually losing his artificial deportment in the interest of the moment. “You, and all others who willingly invaded the peace of these realms, must abide the issue!”

“Then God protect the innocent and defend the right!”

“Amen.”

“Give way, villains!” cried Griffith, facing the party that held the outer door; “give way, or you shall be riddled with our pikes!”

“Show them your muzzles, men!” shouted Borroughcliffe, “but pull no trigger till they advance.”

There was an instant of bustle and preparation, in which the rattling of firearms blended with the suppressed execrations and threats of the intended combatants; and Cecilia and Katherine had both covered their faces to veil the horrid sight that was momentarily expected, when Alice Dunscombe advanced, boldly, between the points of the threatening weapons, and spoke in a voice that stayed the hands that were already uplifted.

“Hear me, men! if men ye be, and not demons, thirsting for each other’s blood; though ye walk abroad in the semblance of Him who died that ye might be elevated to the rank of angels! Call ye this war? Is this the glory that is made to warm the hearts of even silly and confiding women? Is the peace of families to be destroyed to gratify your wicked lust for conquest, and is life to be taken in vain, in order that ye may boast of the foul deed in your wicked revels? Fall back, then, ye British soldiers! if ye be worthy of that name, and give passage to a woman; and remember that the first shot that is fired will be buried in her bosom!”

The men, thus enjoined, shrank before her commanding mien, and a way was made for her exit through that very door which Griffith had, in vain, solicited might be cleared for himself and party. But Alice, instead of advancing, appeared to have suddenly lost the use of those faculties which had already effected so much. Her figure seemed rooted to the spot where she had spoken, and her eyes were fixed in a Settled gaze, as if dwelling on some horrid object, While she yet stood in this attitude of unconscious helplessness, the doorway became again darkened, and the figure of the Pilot was seen on its threshold, clad, as usual, in the humble vestments of his profession, but heavily armed with the weapons of naval war.

For an instant, he stood a silent spectator of the scene; and then advanced calmly, but with searching eyes, into the centre of the apartment.<sup>3</sup>

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For the complete text of *The Pilot*, see: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/7974>

William Thomas Sherman

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³ The Pilot, it turns out and symbolically not unlike the French in the American Revolution, has brought a landing party from the frigate to break the deadlock at St. Ruth's Abbey.