

**A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE MATERIAL
OF JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S
LEATHER-STOCKING SERIES**

JOY E. HAMILL

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE MATERIAL
OF JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S LEATHER-STOCKING SERIES

by Joy E. Hamill.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts Degree, Department of English, The University of Wichita, Wichita, Kansas, 1951.

Abstract of Thesis

This thesis is a study and evaluation of the background materials, the order, and the literary qualities of Cooper's Leather-Stocking Series. Attention has been given to "placing" critically the Series in the field of American Literary history and to a study of the probable effect of the Series on subsequent writing in the field of the historical novel. After a discussion of the order of the novels within the structure of the series, each novel is then studied, with particular emphasis upon the analysis of historical time, setting, and social background and implications.

In each chapter Cooper's deep rooted interest in the growth and the maturation of his essential protagonist, Natty Bumppo, is studied in relation to the historical time delineated in each novel. The author's growth in plotting and manipulation of plot is analyzed, along with his use of various contemporary literary devices, his contributions to novel writing techniques, and his establishment of the American Indian in the tradition of the American novel.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE MATERIAL
OF JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S LEATHER-STOCKING SERIES

BY

JOY E. HAMILL

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

THE MUNICIPAL UNIVERSITY OF WICHITA

WICHITA, KANSAS

JUNE, 1951

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Acknowledgment	iii
CHAPTER	
I. Introduction	1
II. The Deerslayer	9
III. The Last of the Mohicans ...	24
IV. The Pathfinder	39
V. The Pioneers	56
VI. The Prairie	70
VII. Conclusion	85
Bibliography	92

J. W. H. H. H.

INTRODUCTION

It had been long that since the acceptance of the Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776) and the signing of the Treaty of Paris (1783) that Romanticism reached a crescendo of strength in the youthful Union which was clearing for progress and development. An Industrial Revolution was approaching and along with this came the Westward Movement. Man advanced west for adventure and for material acquisition. As Farrington pointed out, every-

thing in the country was in a state of flux. To Dr. Ross M. Taylor, professor of English, under whose guidance I prepared this study, I offer my sincere appreciation. I could not omit or forget a single professor or instructor who has offered encouragement and assistance, therefore, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of them.

Joy E. Hamill

The Romantic Period stressed the individual man, the communication of God with man through nature, and the optimistic outlook. Both the frontier optimism and the sentiment of Nationalism were extremely favorable to Romanticism. The trend of living changed from that of reason to a life controlled by feeling and emotion. Imagination took the place of logical thinking. Also, the period represented a strong protest against the conventional, dominant ideas of the mid-eighteenth century. "Democracy became the common faith of the West, and in becoming the

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It had been less than half a century since the adoption of the Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776) and the signing of the Treaty of Paris (1783) that Romanticism reached a crescendo of strength in the youthful Union which was clamoring for progress and development. An Industrial Revolution was approaching and along with this came the Westward Movement. Men advanced west for adventure and for material acquisition. As Parrington pointed out, everything in the West was new and strange, and the crossing of the mountainous barrier fired the imagination.¹ The Americans were seeking easier ways to wealth than the routine of natural increase.

The Romantic Period stressed Nature, the individual man, the communication of God with man through nature, and the optimistic outlook. Both the frontier optimism and the sentiment of Nationalism were extremely favorable to Romanticism. The trend of living changed from that of reasoning to a life controlled by feeling and emotion. Imagination took the place of logical thinking. Also, the period represented a strong protest against the conventional, dominant ideas of the mid-eighteenth century. "Democracy became the common faith of the West, and in becoming the

¹Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, II, 137.

common faith of the West it was put in the way of becoming the common faith of America."²

It was in this period that James Fenimore Cooper began his writing career by publishing Precaution in 1820. This venture was undertaken after he had examined one of the English novels which he had been reading to his wife, who was ill, and he was known to have remarked, "I could write you a better book than that myself."³ The novel which he had been reading dealt with English society. In his attempt to surpass this creation, published in England, he used the same material. Notwithstanding the fact that Precaution was weak, it was read on both sides of the Atlantic. In England, several critics declared it to be the work of an Englishwoman. Cooper realized, after completion of his highly conventional novel, all that had been accomplished was a mere facsimile of the English style. It had not been his intention to imitate; therefore he at once set to work to rectify his wrong by writing in a purely original style and making use of American material. Unquestionably this was an important victory for the beginning writer. Notice that American though he was, Cooper at first shared the belief that native themes were too commonplace for serious

²Ibid., 138.

³James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 17.

literary treatment. Friends with better judgment urged him to deal with our own land. In examining authors and their writings, we must realize, critically speaking, the ones who are considered the best writers are those who have utilized the everyday person, place, and situation. Cooper was not alone in feeling that novels should be produced by Americans, because many others felt the need for home-written fiction. Some few had attempted writing, but nothing of creditable worth had been created. So, it may be said of Cooper's second trial, The Spy, which appeared December 22, 1821, that the author was made known to American fiction.⁴

The Spy was based upon a story of a secret agent during the Revolutionary War (1776-1783) which had once been told Cooper. The agent, from the county in which Cooper was then living, had aided the American cause. This gave a source of data which was advantageous to the author in two ways: first he was working with a subject which was wholly American, and second, he was thoroughly acquainted with the background and setting of the situation. After laying plans for the novel, Cooper delayed writing the second half of the story and had only the first volume published. When he learned that this volume had been a success with the public, he wrote the final chapters. Of his historical tales

⁴William P. Trent, John Erskine, Stuart P. Sherman, and Carl Van Doren, Editors, The Cambridge History of American Literature, 295.

the best was The Spy, with its accounts of less known aspects of the Revolutionary War, such as local events which bore a direct relation to the main current, and yet gave the writer greater freedom than if he had been confined to well-known characters and their deeds. So realistic was the picture of Harvey Birch that many persons believed him to be an actual historical character. One of the most original devices in this story was the presence of Washington himself in disguise, and with no mention of his real identity.

Neither Precaution nor The Spy brought Cooper the recognition that came with The Pioneers (1823). Also, this frontier novel began the Leather-Stocking Series. The serial novels were not presented to the public in the regular course of their incidents. The Pioneers portrayed the hunter as already old. The novel showed him driven from his early haunts in the forest by the sound of the axe, and the smoke of the settler.⁵ Leather-Stocking became a popular character along with Chingachgook and the contemporary readers pleaded to hear more of the beloved characters even though they had not yet gained the breadth that they were later to acquire. Three years after the appearance of The Pioneers, The Last of the Mohicans (1826) was published, which took the readers back to an earlier period in the life of the

⁵James Fenimore Cooper, The Deerslayer, 3.

hero. In this novel there was a great feeling for nature, which was a fundamental of the Romantic Period. Leather-Stocking was portrayed as Hawkeye and demonstrated the rugged individualism, another basic element of the period. Cooper in The Last of the Mohicans captivated the romance of border warfare by staging small battles between the whites and Indians, which demonstrated the contest for the continent in the French and Indian War (1754-1763).

The year 1827, found Natty still fleeing civilization and seeking nature in the raw, when The Prairie (1827) reached the public eye. Natty appeared in this plains novel, far beyond the Mississippi, some twenty years older than in The Pioneers. He was found mourning for the once existent forest which had been "butchered" by the Westward Movement and the rapid growth of civilization. Since old age had crowded upon the aged hunter and the loss of his perfect aim had arrived, he was forced to condescend to a mere trapper. The remorseful old man felt banished, without realizing the great store of philosophy which he had at his command. Natty had learned the secrets of the open spaces and had become a part of them. In the last scene the trapper gave up his life, which had been most romantically spent. Cooper expected to leave the trapper after he had followed him to the grave, but the readers of the day were not content to forget their beloved character and induced his author to bring him back into action in The Pathfinder.

It was not long until a fifth novel, The Deerslayer, was published and this completed the Leather-Stocking Series.⁶

A combination was utilized by Cooper in The Pathfinder. He brought together his best two topics, a ship and Indian fighting. Also, within the pages of this novel, Cooper's most outstanding character, Natty Bumppo, was again presented, but in a different role. Natty was now a lover.⁷ Cooper in his introduction to The Pathfinder expressed to the public how extremely difficult it was to present the same character in four separate works, having the same characteristics maintained through all the novels, without tiring the reader with tedious repetition.⁸ With this information, the experimental change can be appreciated by the student of American Literature. Natty became very much infatuated with a girl, whom he was to rescue in the forest. Her father sent Natty to rescue his daughter, and before the father's death in battle he did arrange the engagement of Mabel and Natty. Mabel did not feel that she was equal to

⁶The publication dates of these five novels are, in order, as follows: The Pioneers (1823), The Last of the Mohicans (1826), The Prairie (1827), The Pathfinder (1840), and The Deerslayer (1841).

⁷Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 142.

⁸James Fenimore Cooper, The Pathfinder, 3.

the hunter and insisted that they should not marry. Details will later be covered in the discussion of the plot. Deeply grieved, Natty gave the girl up and returned to his forest life with his Indian friend. Even though this affair for a time threatened to domesticate Natty, by his better judgment and sacrifice he was restored to his old solitude.⁹

The Deerslayer, being written last, showed a sensible writing art in rounding out the character of Natty Bumppo. The hunter received the name of Deerslayer and was made ill when he shot his first man.¹⁰

At one time it was Cooper's plan to write a sixth novel, carrying Natty into the Revolutionary War, but apparently upon completion of The Deerslayer he felt that the task had been satisfactorily finished and there would be no need of continuance. It is possible that the author felt an earlier adjoining section of the hunter's life would filter the color from his life of action with the frontier. Indubitably war would have lessened the reader's feeling of authenticity in the true and simple character of Natty. It is highly improbable that the extreme patriotism necessary in a hero of that day could have been found in the philosophical woodsman. "Justice, not partisanship, is Leather-Stocking's

⁹Trent, Editor, American Literature, 303.

¹⁰Bartholow V. Crawford, Outline-History of American Literature, 68.

essential trait."¹¹

The following chapters will be a study of the novels within the skeleton of James Fenimore Cooper's Leather-Stocking Series. By this, it is meant that the novels included in the series will be individually examined in an attempt to determine the fundamental characteristics of these novels. Ideas, themes, plots, conflicts, characters, and settings must be carefully evaluated in such an attempt.

¹¹Trent, Editor, American Literature, 304.

CHAPTER II

THE DEERSLAYER

In August, 1841, The Deerslayer made its appearance before the public as the last book to be written in the Leather-Stocking Series. Although it was the last volume to be published, it did not bring Natty Bumppo's life to a close as would be expected, but was the story of his coming of age. Therefore, sequential events considered, The Deerslayer was the first volume of the five book series. After a character's life has been brought to a close, as Natty's was in The Prairie, it is a most difficult task for an author to raise him from the grave and again place him in life-like circumstances. Even more complex was the job for Cooper, because not only was it necessary for him to revive the old trapper, but he had to turn the calendar back to the youth of this important character. It is surprising to find how successfully this project was completed, and is true of both The Pathfinder and The Deerslayer.

James Fenimore Cooper chose for the scene of this novel the Otsego Lake area prior to the year 1760.¹ In fact, the events of the story took place between the years 1740 and 1745. At this time the settled portions of New York state were confined to four counties, a narrow belt of country on each side of the Hudson, extending from its mouth to the falls

¹Cooper, The Deerslayer, Preface, 8.

near its head, and to a few advanced "neighborhoods" on the Mohawk and the Schoharie.² The entire area was at that time a virgin wilderness. This expanse of woods supplied cover for the native Indians as they trod their bloody war-paths.

Some garrisons had been established by this time and the soldiers were desperately attempting to hold back the warring savages. It was almost impossible for "palefaces" to survive beyond the settlements and the garrisons; among these people Cooper placed his narrative.

At the beginning of the story, Natty, the Deerslayer, and Harry March were making their way to Otsego Lake. Natty had already developed a keen eye, had become an excellent shot, and by this time was called a young woodsman. Already he had acquired the appellation of Deerslayer from the Delaware Indians, because he had only taken the life of the deer and not that of man. He had long lived among the Delawares and had successfully learned the ways of the forest. Above all, he was a man of honesty and bravery; once he promised something, even though it was to his foe and regardless of the consequences to his person, never would he fail in seeing it through. Even when he was held a captive by the Iroquois and allowed a few hours away from the Indian encampment, at the promised hour he returned to face the

²Ibid., 12

tortures and possible death that was in store for him at the hands of his enemies. As a whole the character of Deerslayer was good and far above many characters, yet somewhat priggish.

His companion, Hurry Harry March provided an excellent contrast. While Natty was of such an honorable character, his travelling friend, a frontiersman, possessed an exceedingly rude code of ethics.³ Hurry had reached the age of twenty six or eight, while Natty was a few years his junior.⁴ Hurry Harry was both indifferent and reckless, of fine form and great stature. Also, later in the story he united with Tom Hutter, dissolute lord of Muskrat Castle, a brute, and supposedly the father of Judith and Hetty, in the belief that no deception or cruelty was too great to be practiced on an Indian.⁵ This, of course, was not the feeling of the Deerslayer. Such contrasts as these helped the characterizations to stand apart and brought about many small conflicts, some developing into difficulties, within the plot which aided both the development and interest.

After a long journey through the forest wilds, the pair reached the margin of the beautiful lake that Deerslayer was later to name "Glimmerglass". It was Natty's

³Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel, 143.

⁴Cooper, The Deerslayer, 15.

⁵Cowie, The American Novel, 144.

first visit to Otsego and was far beyond all his expectations. As the pair stood by the side of the great pool of water, they saw the following:

"On a level with a point lay a broad sheet of water, so placid and limpid, that it resembled a bed of the pure mountain atmosphere, compressed into a setting of hills and woods. Its length was about three leagues, while its breadth was irregular, expanding to half a league, or even more, opposite to the point, and contracting to less than half that distance more to the southward. Of course its margin was irregular, being indented by bays, and broken by many projecting low points. At its northern or nearest end it was bounded by an isolated mountain, lower land falling off east and west, gracefully relieving the sweep of the outline. Still the character of the country was mountainous; high hills or low mountains rising abruptly from the water, on quite nine-tenths of its circuit. The exceptions, indeed, only served a little to vary the scene; and even beyond the parts of the shore that were comparatively low, the background was high though more distant.

But the most striking peculiarities of this scene were its solemn solitude and sweet repose. On all sides, wherever the eye turned, nothing met it but the mirror-like surface of the lake, the placid view of heaven, and the dense setting of woods. So rich and fleecy were the outlines of the forest that scarce an opening could be seen--the whole visible earth, from the rounded mountain-top to the water's edge, presenting one unvaried hue of unbroken verdure. As if vegetation were not satisfied with a triumph so complete, the trees overhung the lake itself, shooting out toward the light; and there were miles along its eastern shore where a boat might have pulled beneath the branches of dark, Rembrandt-looking hemlocks, "quivering aspens," and melancholy pines. In a word, the hand of man had never yet defaced or deformed any part of this native scene, which lay bathed in the sunlight, a glorious picture of affluent forest grandeur, softened by the balminess of June, and

relieved by the beautiful variety afforded by the presence of so broad an expanse of water."⁶

With this description, Cooper both set the scene for his narrative and expressed his love of nature, which was a true Romantic element. The beauty of the lake dominated his story and gave it a tone of deep and lovely unreality.⁷ Upon this very lake Muskrat Castle was located. The home stood on piling that reached down to a long narrow shoal which extended for a few hundred yards and rose within six or eight feet of the surface of the lake. This was the home of Thomas Hutter, or Floating Tom, and his two daughters, Judith and Hetty.

Judith Hutter was a most beautiful young lady loving the fancies of dress. A love conflict in the story evolved around Judith that to a certain extent complicated matters for a period of time. Harry March, although he knew her faults, loved Judith and wished to marry her, but she would not except his offer, because she loved not him but another. Regardless of her love for Natty, Judith's reputation was stained by past coquetries; she was obviously not an appropriate mate for the chaste Leather-Stocking, and eventually was consigned to an offstage marriage with a British

⁶Cooper, The Deerslayer, 29.

⁷Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 145.

officer.⁸ Many feel that a girl of Judith's type would not have made the proposal to Deerslayer. However, considering the background it is more easily seen. The girl's mother apparently had been betrayed and deserted and had married Thomas Hutter to cover her disgrace. This fact alone would have a tremendous bearing upon Judith's psychological development, because the marriage between the two parents was never a harmonious association. Such a home cannot offer the love that is necessary for a child's physical, mental, and psychological growth. Therefore, as an adult Judith was unable to cope with situations that presented themselves and was eager to brush them aside without full consideration. Judith knew that she loved Hawkeye or Deerslayer and through some added selfishness was quite reluctant to consider whether he returned this love or not. Then, too, the two girls' mother had been dead for years and they had continued to live with a man who supposedly was their own father; the shock of hearing from Hutter's own lips in his last moments of consciousness before death that they truly were not his daughters would cause a mental upset later to develop into insecurity. This feeling of insecurity without the proper thought could also hasten a girl into seeking a means of livelihood that would be more stable. Along with these factors the death of her sister

⁸Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land, 67.

Hetty may be added. Completely without her lifetime companion, Judith was anxious to find another companion amounting to more than just a mere friend upon whom she could cast her affection. With these elements of background examined it is revealed that Judith's proposal of marriage to Deerslayer was not improbable. In fact, her asking him, the way he met it, and her acceptance of his decision were more true to human nature than most people can imagine.⁹

In contrast to Judith was her sister Hetty. This girl was a half-wit made useful by Cooper because of the Indian partiality to white people who were known to be subnormal mentally.¹⁰ Hetty Hutter was just enough below normal to reach a state of grace. She could not be called an idiot, yet her mind was just enough enfeebled to lose most of the traits that are connected with the more artful qualities, and to retain its frankness and love of truth.¹¹ While Hetty's mother was still alive, she had read much from the Bible and taught the girl all she could about the Good Book. This was the most blessed learning that the mother could have imparted to the young girl, because the Bible

⁹Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction, An Historical and Critical Survey, 62.

¹⁰Cowie, The American Novel, 144.

¹¹Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 146.

material was medicine for the soul and mind of poor Hetty. At one time soon after the death of her mother Hetty thought of taking her own life due to her sorrow and loneliness, but upon consulting her Bible and praying to God, she found renewed faith and strength. Poor Hetty was truly a Christian girl, and knew that God was with her. This was brought out when Hurry Harry and Tom Hutter were captured by the Canada Indians after the two white men had gone into their encampment seeking scalps for bounty. Hetty went ashore to reach the Indians and to plead for the lives of her father and Hurry. Judith discovering the disappearance of her sister pursued her begging the girl to return to their humble home. The following shows the faith of Hetty Hutter:

"Oh, Hetty, what is't you do! Remember 'tis drawing near midnight, and that the woods are filled with savages and wild beasts!"

"Neither will harm a poor half-witted girl, Judith. God is as much with me here as He would be in the ark, or in the hut. I am going to help my father, and poor Hurry Harry; they will be tortured and slain, unless some one cares for them."¹²

Hetty, with her religious training, frankness and truth, and who was not quite normal, was one of Cooper's best women characters. Neither of the sisters were the "sweet type" of which Cooper was so fond.¹³

¹²Cooper, The Deerslayer, 160.

¹³Quinn, American Fiction, 62.

Another love affair was present in The Deerslayer, which had important bearings upon the entire story. This affair was between Chingachgook and the lovely Delaware maiden, Wah-ta! Wah, or Hist. Chingachgook was a noble, tall, handsome, and athletic young Indian warrior. Upon meeting the Mohican at the rock, Deerslayer introduced him to the two girls.

"Judith and Hetty," said Deerslayer, with an untaught, natural courtesy, "This is the Mohican chief of whom you've heard me speak; Chingachgook, as he is called, which signifies the Big Serpent; so named for his wisdom, and prudence, and cunning; my 'arliest and latest friend. I know'd it must be he, by the hawk's feather over the left ear, most other warriors wearing 'em on the war lock."¹⁴

Chingachgook's betrothed, Wah-ta! Wah, had been captured by the Iroquois Indians and was being held to become the spouse of a young Canada brave. This explains the trip to Otsego Lake. This love affair of the two young Indians was mingled with all the adventures of The Deerslayer, also it evoked some of Cooper's most beautiful prose passages.¹⁵

The idea and theme are two of the important elements of a novel and it would be well at this point to discover those that James Fenimore Cooper used in The Deerslayer. The main idea of the entire fictitious tale was loyalty, while the theme was the loyalty to friends against the pressing and treacherous Indians.

¹⁴Cooper, The Deerslayer, 145.

¹⁵Cowie, The American Novel, 144.

Suspense was predominant throughout the entire plot of The Deerslayer. In each of the struggles against the Canadas, Deerslayer was fighting for the sake of friends. Many times he fought for the sake of the wickedly intelligent Judith Hutter who loved him. The introduction of the plot revealed that Wah-ta! Wah, a Delaware maiden betrothed to Chingachgook, had been captured and carried away by the Canadas or Iroquois Indians. This young Delaware chief was to meet Natty on the shore of the Otsego; the twenty year old frontiersman was to aid in the rescue of Hist. Cooper in this way presented the real purpose of the adventure to be found within the plot. Along with this purpose was attached a subordinate quality, that of the boy's everlasting affection for his companion and brother-in-arms, the young Delaware warrior, which was to strengthen the foundation for the rising action.¹⁶ Although Natty had never taken the life of any individual, this binding loyalty sent him out on his first warpath which resulted in his first human killing. This act created a quality to affect the development and living of his entire life. This distress with which Deerslayer realized that he had human blood on his hands, became, in the light of his future, immensely eloquent.¹⁷

¹⁶Carl Van Doren, The American Novel, 1789-1939, 37.

¹⁷Ibid., 38.

Cooper's plot was made more complicated and the rising action hastened by the incident of Hurry and Tom Hutter deliberately seeking the scalps of the red men for set bounty. While the two were within the borders of the Indian encampment they were captured before either had acquired a single scalp. Here arose a conflict between the two scalping white men and the Canadas, besides being against the belief of Natty, which complicated the most important purpose of the entire narrative, that of freeing the betrothed Hist. During the unfortunate incarceration of Hurry and Tom, Hetty Hutter joined the ranks of the Indians seeking clemency for the prisoners. Her situation was strengthened by a skilled use of Bible readings and explanations, which were translated to the red men by the Delaware maiden who was held captive. Hetty was driven to this act by her impossible love for Harry March. Here it is found that there must be a motive behind all acts which are attempted to solve conflicts. Hetty had two motives; her main one was the knowledge that these individuals needed assistance; and secondly was her own strong love for one of the prisoners.

Later, after the two prisoners had gained their freedom, the Canadas attacked the hut. Hurry was rescued by their friends but it proved utterly impossible for them to save Tom Hutter. He was left to die after being stabbed and scalped by the Indians. This advanced fighting between the

Iroquois and the small force of white men, including the young Delaware warrior, carried the rising action close to the oncoming climax.

Next, Natty and Chingachgook stole into the encampment of their enemies to retrieve Wah-ta! Wah. After the two Delaware Indians were reunited they managed to escape, but this was not the fate of Deerslayer, for he was captured. Another factor which complicated the situation of the hunter was the death of one of the Canadas. Natty did not know at this time that it would be his lot to kill another before he was again to be free. Each event brought more and more suspense until finally the climax was reached. Judith Hutter, dressed like a queen with all possible finery dawned, had just entered the circle of Canadas, where she found Deerslayer bound and being tortured, Hetty having just failed in an attempt for mercy to be shown Natty. Judith, posing as a lady of the land of quite important position, along with being Judith of the Bible, was attempting to buy Deerslayer's freedom. Judith being a Biblical character was hard for the Indians to understand, but when the younger sister was asked by the Huron chief orator concerning this claim, she immediately told the Hurons otherwise. Her truthfulness and frankness would not allow her to misrepresent anything regardless what was at stake. These Indians believed in what Hetty had to say; they did not consult their prisoner about the matter as Judith wished them to do.

"You can ask my name of your prisoner," returned the girl. "It is Judith; and there is a great deal of the history of Judith in the palefaces' best book, the Bible. If I am a bird of fine feather, I have also my name."

"No," answered the wily Huron, betraying the artifice he had so long practised by speaking in English with tolerable accuracy; "I not ask prisoner. He tired; he want rest. I ask my daughter with feeble mind. She speak truth. Come here, daughter; you answer. Your name Hetty?"

"Yes, that's what they call me," returned the girl; "though it's written Esther in the Bible."

"He write him in Bible, too? All write in Bible. No matter--what her name?"

"That's Judith, and it's so written in the Bible, though father sometimes called her Jude. That's my sister Judith, Thomas Hutter's daughter--Thomas Hutter, whom you called the Muskrat; though he was no muskrat, but a man, like yourself--he lived in a house on the water, and that was enough for you."¹⁸

Immediately the entire scheme was lost. With this loss the suspense of the story reached its highest peak along with the arrival of the climax. The entire scene of torture was effective though a bit long and drawn out.¹⁹ A full regiment appeared from the garrison which had been guided to Otsego by Hurry. This steady approach of British troops with their favorite weapon, the bayonet, was good art.²⁰ Upon arrival at the lake the party was assisted by the young Delaware warrior. They reached the point without further

¹⁸Cooper, The Deerslayer, 503.

¹⁹Quinn, American Fiction, 63.

²⁰Ibid.

delay and in time to save the lives of all except that of poor Hetty. This incident of battle between the regiment and the Iroquois Indians brought about the falling action in the scheme of the novel.

The denouement is quite easily recognized in this book; it is specific and well organized. Hetty passed from the trials of life due to a wound received during the fighting. After the burial of Hetty by the side of her mother and Tom Hutter in Otsego Lake, Judith realized how completely alone she was. It was at this time she proposed to Deer-slayer. When Judith's plan failed, she accompanied the soldiers back to the garrison, never again to see the beloved hero. Chingachgook, Hist, and Natty were left to make their way back to the village of the Delaware tribe.

Cooper closed this narrative by allowing the reader to look forward in the lives of the remaining characters, which proved to be a most successful method for finishing this tale. After a period of fifteen years had elapsed, the author presented a glimpse into the surroundings and doings of Natty Bumppo. Chingachgook and Hist had been married shortly after arriving in the Delaware village. In due time, a son was born to them, which required the life of the mother. When Cooper permitted the reader to return to the characters, Natty, Chingachgook, and his son were making their way back to Otsego Lake. Marks of the old battle against the Iroquois could be found, however they

were few and took patience in finding. Old Muskrat Castle was decaying with the years and the ark had long been stranded upon the pebbled shore. This quite completely brought the tale of The Deerslayer, which is considered one of the best of Cooper's works, to a close.²¹

This last written tale of the Leather-Stocking Series is the simplest in plot and most equivocal in meaning.²² About the best advice given, to be considered when reading The Deerslayer, was that of D. H. Lawrence, a writer whose gifts were in most ways the antithesis of Cooper's, yet a person fully understanding how to read Cooper. "Read it as a lovely myth..."²³ In this sense, it is the essence of epic. Time and distance are its aids; suspension of disbelief is its commandment.²⁴

²¹Quinn, American Fiction, 62.

²²Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 145.

²³Cowie, The American Novel, 164.

²⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS

During the years of 1826 and 1827, James Fenimore Cooper likely reached the peak of his writing career in the two books, The Last of the Mohicans (February, 1826) and The Prairie (May, 1827).¹ In The Last of the Mohicans, Cooper developed the best executed plot to be found in the entire Leather-Stocking Series. Along with this, he formed characters of noble Indians in Uncas and Chingachgook, and good, minor characters in Cora, Adam, and Heyward. "The feeling for nature and the excitement of the action are remarkable, but less so than the nostalgia of the Indians who have to leave their home."²

It was in the summer of 1825, that a party of about six men left New York to make a journey to Saratoga and Lake George. James Fenimore Cooper accompanied this group. They moved up the Hudson until they reached West Point; here in the highlands they stopped spending some little time. Next, they visited Catskill, which the author held dear, as may be confirmed by Natty. In the village of Lebanon the group visited the poor, misled Shakers. Other places where the party stopped before arriving at Lake George were Albany, Cohoes, Saratoga, Ballston, and finally the lake. After staying on the banks with much enthusiasm, then visiting

¹Trent, Editor, American Literature, 297.

²Crawford, An Outline-History, 68.

Ticonderoga and Lake Champlain, the group of excursionists retraced their steps, pausing for an entire half day at Glenn's Falls. It was here while they were within the caverns that one of the gentlemen of the party remarked to Cooper that they were now visiting the very scene for a romance. The author promised to bring forth a novel in which the caves would have a place. Cooper before leaving the falls had gone over the entire landscape and had filed in his mind (deep well) all information that would be needed at a later hour. He did not see it as it lay in 1825, but his imagination turned the years back before the white man began to invade with his civilization. Within his mind all features of the place were restored to their original condition before man had defaced them; old forests were recreated, the white man was erased; and the waters fell once more, as they had fallen years before, in full, natural torrents, unchecked by any man made barriers. This is one of the accomplishments of Cooper that made him a novelist: his capacity for remembering combined with a most active imagination.

69769
Upon his return from the excursion he began The Last of the Mohicans. The book was rapidly written, and it was only some three or four months after the accomplishment of the first few pages that the entire narrative was completed. "Planned beneath the summer leaves, those leaves had scarcely fallen when the story was told, and Natty and Chingachgook

were left in the wilderness, beside the rude grave of Uncas."³

Cooper very effectively outlined and produced the Indian character of Uncas, the forest's youngest son, gallant, swift, courteous, a lover for whom there was no hope, and the last of the Mohicans. It is true that Cooper in some respects idealized this great character; however he was the hero of an everlasting tale. Upon Uncas there were bestowed some of the virtues that the philosophers of the times had taught the world to find in a state of nature.⁴ When the author chose a Mohican for his Indian hero, and especially since Cooper was a New Yorker, it was very natural, because the Mohican tribe was one of the first to meet Hudson when he discovered the Hudson River. These Indians had possession at points on both banks of the river northward to the mouth of the Mohawk. Of course, their greatest power was on the eastern bank. These Mohicans of the Hudson, the Mohicander, the Mohegans of New England, Pequots, and Narragansetts were all kindred clans, had nearly the same dialects, and were all members of the Algonquin race.

In 1627, the Mohicans were to some extent inferior to the Iroquois, or the Five Nations. In 1628, the Mohicans, who were living near Fort Orange, warred against the Mohawks,

³James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, Introduction, xii.

⁴Trent, Editor, American Literature, 298.

but were defeated and were driven back to the east where they once again built a village upon the banks of the Connecticut. Soon they were attacked in this new village by the Pequots. This amounted to a long and bloody strife, but the New Englanders took sides with the Mohicans and Uncas, their chief. Shortly after this alliance had been formed, the Pequots were inhumanely wiped out. About ten years later, with the chief force of the Mohicans in New England, came the bitter battle of Uncas and his warriors against the Narragansetts. Although this strife brought great sorrow and death to the Mohicans, there was something else that had a greater bearing on their downward path. The thing that actually destroyed their life and spirit was the battle against firearms, the cunning desire for wealth, cruelty, and the poison firewater of their white neighbors, with whom they had been friends and allies for more than two centuries.⁵ It was from this disconsolate background that Cooper developed his wonderful hero of Uncas. Cooper's mysterious Uncas, the last of his race, proved to be a fragment of America's epic.⁶

Chingachgook, companion of Natty Bumppo, throughout The Deerslayer, continued to accompany the hunter in The Last of the Mohicans. Natty had acquired the name of

⁵Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, Introduction, xviii.

⁶Cowie, The American Novel, 131.

Hawkeye. Uncas was the son of Chingachgook and Wah-ta! Wah and was spoken of in the closing of The Deerslayer. These three characters and their friendship were hinges which helped Cooper to link the two volumes together.

James Fenimore Cooper set the time of his novel by history, the year 1757. It was the third year of the war between France and England in North America, that word was received at Fort Edward, where General Webb lay with five thousand men, that the Frenchman Montcalm was moving up Lake Champlain with a large army and was planning to attack Fort William Henry. Around this siege of Fort William Henry revolved the incidents of the story.⁷ It was not Cooper's idea to write an historical romance, but an Indian romance. In this attempt he made the forest scenes the chief interest of the narrative with emphasis upon the Indian. Although Cooper had not intended to portray historical events, Colonel Munro's gallant defense of the fort was positively and factually a portion of America's historical background. The Last of the Mohicans was Cooper's most famous and most widely read work, his first great adventure story of Indian fighting, and probably his best.⁸ It was this historical background combined with his noble and bad Indians always in

⁷Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, Introduction, xxii.

⁸Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 43.

conflict that caused this particular novel to be so widely read and to last through the years.

Fort William Henry was held by a small force under Colonel Munro, a veteran Scotchman, and a very limited number of men whom General Webb had forwarded to help them. Captain Duncan Heyward had been detached to escort Munro's daughters, Alice and Cora, to the fort. An Indian runner, Magua, known as Le Renard Subtil, had been chosen as the small group's guide. Cooper introduced his tale with this background, and it was not until the girls, Cora and Alice, had become so gravely worried when their guide led them down a narrow, dark forest path which he told them was merely a shorter way and would save much time, that Cooper really commenced any notable amount of rising action. Along with this came much suspense, which, of course, was one of Cooper's strongest implements of writing skill. It was also one of his best techniques. Soon after they had commenced to travel this new dark path, they heard a horse closing in from behind; they were soon joined by David Gamut, who signified that he too was bound for the same fort. After this acclamation, he began to sing New England hymns, but was stopped by the warning that Montcalm's Indian allies might be close at hand, therefore silence was necessary to avert danger. The suspense thickened as the four white persons followed Magua, never realizing the true danger ahead, the trap which their Indian guide had already

prepared. A short time later Magua claimed to have lost the way and soon deserted them.

In the forest not far from the deserted group, Hawkeye and Chingachgook talked together. The son of Chingachgook, Uncas, approached informing the hunter and the Delaware that the spies of Montcalm, the hated Maquas, were hiding in the woods. Munro's daughters and the white men soon came upon Hawkeye and the Delawares telling them that they were lost. Heyward told of the Indian who had been guiding them.

"It is enough, for the present, that we trusted to an Indian guide to take us by a nearer, though blinder path, and that we are deceived in his knowledge. In plain words, we know not where we are."

"An Indian lost in the woods?" said the scout, shaking his head doubtingly; "when the sun is scorching the tree-tops, and the water-courses are full; when the moss on every beech he sees will tell him in which quarter the north star will shine at night! The woods are full of deer-paths which run to the streams and licks, places well known to everybody; nor have the geese done their flight to the Canadian waters altogether! 'Tis strange that an Indian should be lost atwixt Horicon and the bend of the river! Is he a Mohawk?"⁹

Hawkeye agreed to lead them the rest of the way to Fort William Henry, but said that they would be obliged to wait until morning due to the great danger of falling into the hands of their foe at night. The sun was sinking and dark was fast creeping over the vast forest.

Hawkeye examined the surrounding woods and soon realized

⁹Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, 42.

that the party of white persons had been led into a trap. While spending the night in a cave, they were attacked by the Maquas. During the battle with the Indians, the white party ran out of ammunition. Hawkeye and the Mohicans set out for Fort William Henry to secure aid from Colonel Munro, but while they were gone, the others were taken prisoners by the Indians. With this came one of the peaks in Cooper's outline of suspense, which kept repeating itself until near the end of the tale when Cooper made way and developed the climax.

Magua made known the prisoners' fate; Cora was to become his squaw, Alice was to be set free. Repulsed, Magua tied the four whites to trees and had stakes of glowing wood prepared for the prisoners' torture. Cora again was given a chance to become the enemy's squaw which would release her sister and Duncan to be restored to their own people. After Cora was once more offered this same choice, she was strengthened by words from her sister which held her to her refusal of the rogue's terms. Alice's words to Cora portrayed the full strength and courage that was found in both of Cooper's women characters, regardless of Alice's timidity and Cora's bravery.

"No, no, no; better that we die as we have lived, together!"¹⁰

¹⁰Ibid., 137.

At some length Hawkeye and the Mohicans appeared and battled the torturing Hurons. All were killed, except the depraved Magua who escaped alive. This capture, rescue, and other recaptures of Munro's daughters were the essential incidents of Cooper's narrative.¹¹ These main happenings were well executed and placed in the plot which motivated the progressive action. The girls, Hawkeye, the Delawares, and all on their side showed the possession of true virtue, while Magua and his side displayed nothing but corruption and vice. James Grossman well expressed the contrast between a hero and a villain.

"Uncas can be only good and noble in his love for Cora, Magua base and wicked. Moral choice is never necessary, although its forms are presented to give variety to the incidents; we know Cora will refuse to be Magua's squaw even to save Alice's life. The possible problems that might be raised by Uncas' love for Cora and by Cora's love for the man in love with Alice are conveniently avoided by the deaths at the end of the tale of both Cora and Uncas."¹²

Cooper developed heroic Uncas and brave Cora to contrast each other in color. Uncas was not aware of the reason for his attraction to Cora, but the author had brought this about by giving the girl a slight trace of negro blood. This device was presented by Cooper to produce a quality of being fitting, rather than an object of any

¹¹Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 43.

¹²Ibid., 44.

great significance. With the trace of blood of a darker race in her veins, Cora would have been a good match for Uncas, but Cooper had much more to gain by bringing about the death of the last Mohican, than by introducing marriage.¹³

The party finally reached Fort William Henry, but were outnumbered and overpowered by Montcalm and his forces. Therefore, the little group were forced to accept his offer to let them return to Fort Edward. Before leaving, they witnessed a horrible sight. Magua was speaking to the Indians and immediately one of the Hurons snatched up a baby and dashed its brains out on the ground, which was the signal for a massacre. Two thousand Indians at once began to fight with their victims, and Magua got away with Cora and Alice. David Gamut followed them. There was never any rest from suspense throughout the entire story and pursuit was practically the whole plot. This action, also the setting, of The Last of the Mohicans was on the same high plane as the characters. All the events took place in the forest which surrounded them with a changeless majesty that sharpened, by contrast, the restless sense of danger.¹⁴ Along with this, Cooper's setting was described not as a mere love for nature, but as an implement of motivation which successfully carried along the action of the plot, and too, these descriptive passages enhanced and aided the characters' development.

¹³Ibid., 45.

¹⁴Trent, Editor, American Literature, 299.

These wonderful scenes intensified the reader's interest in the characters.¹⁵

Three days after Magua had made away with the girls, Hawkeye, the Mohicans, Munro, and Heyward, unable to find the bodies of Cora and Alice, realized their fate. Upon realization of the girls' danger, Hawkeye and the Delawares began their pursuit, and found upon the trail David Gamut in full war paint near one of the Huron encampments. He had been most fortunate, because the Hurons, believing him to be insane, had allowed him to live. Duncan entered the camp where Alice and Cora were held prisoners. As he, disguised as a medicine man, approached the Indians the chief asked him to cure a sick woman, and led him to a cave which had a bear roped at its entrance. The chief left him alone with the ill woman. No sooner done, than was Duncan to make two great discoveries; the bear was Hawkeye in disguise, while Alice was held prisoner in the back of this same cave. Duncan and Alice were discovered by Magua and he was about to go to the Indians and order the two tortured, when Hawkeye managed to overpower him and keep such an order from ever being issued. The bearskin allowed Hawkeye, the Indians thinking the skin contained one of their own wizards, to leave the cave with the medicine man, who was really Duncan, and Alice, disguised in the sick woman's clothing. The escape

¹⁵Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 44.

was not noticed until after they had freed Uncas and were quite a distance outside the Indian encampment.

The party, after escaping the Huron encampment, pressed on in search of Cora, who had been left by Magua in the care of the neighboring Tortoise Delawares. Before they had time to rescue her, Magua had again left with her. He was enabled to do this due to the Indian hospitality which forced the tribe to allow this departure without pursuit until sunset. Immediately after the sun had fled from the sky, the Tortoises rushed down the trail after the Hurons. The battle that followed was grim and bloody. It continued until only Magua and two other Hurons survived. At this moment Magua ran with Cora toward the mountains, until Cora refused to go farther. With a piercing cry, Uncas leaped down from a great height upon the ledge where Magua and Cora had stopped. Uncas fell dazed and Magua plunged his knife into the Mohican's back. Magua's companions at the very moment took the life of Cora. Uncas, seizing every portion of his own ebbing strength, with a single thrust hurled Cora's murderer into the abyss. His power now completely usurped, he fell dead beneath the thrusts of Magua's dagger. In this way Cooper brought about the full climax of his story with the death of Uncas, the son of the last of the Mohicans. Magua had triumphed and he turned to leap across the precipice, but jumped short of the opposite edge and saved himself by clinging to some shrubs. Hawkeye watched and as

the Huron was about to pull himself up, the hunter raised his rifle and fired. Magua plunged downward to certain death.

The denouement was the solving of all problems and making known those who were to be left living after the last battle, the certain death of Magua, and the burial of the Mohican and Cora. Chingachgook's last tribute to his son brought the closing of the narrative.

"Why do my brothers mourn?" he said, regarding the dark race of dejected warriors by whom he was environed, "why do my daughters weep? that a young man has gone to the happy hunting-grounds; that a chief has filled his time with honor? He was good; he was dutiful; he was brave. Who can deny it? The Manitto had need of such a warrior, and he has called him away. As for me, the son and the father of Uncas, I am a blazed pine, in a clearing of the pale-faces. My race has gone from the shores of the salt lake and the hills of the Delawares. But who can say that the serpent of his tribe has forgotten his wisdom? I am alone--"¹⁶

At this Hawkeye protested that his dear companion was not alone, that he, the hunter, was with him. Hawkeye expressed how much he had loved the lad and how he should never forget him. The two long time friends grasped each other's hands with warm feeling and bowed their heads together, while the scalding tears fell upon the fresh earth of Uncas' grave.

In this work, which was published in 1826, the feeling for nature and the great excitement of the action were remarkable, but not as much as the nostalgia of the Indians

¹⁶Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, 443.

who had to leave their homes.¹⁷ The Last of the Mohicans was truly an adventure story with no serious concern with the outside world that it used as a decoration and an aid to the action within the plot. Cooper used such a broad setting for the story's narrow adventures. The small battles and conflicts which took place gave the feeling and seemed to be a part of the French and Indian War and of the entire struggle for the continent by the shifting of the scene. This achievement was used by Cooper to resume the chase that was so important to his plot.¹⁸ This novel was filled with elements, as the running fight, the pendulum-like swing between temporary triumph and cruel reversal, the capture, the rescue, torture, massacre, generosity toward a foe, breathtaking surprise, enduring courage and silent suffering, the ultimate triumph of the right side, and poetic justice, which brought Cooper much praise than as well as now.¹⁹

In this book, Cooper took the hunter, who was in the days of his prime, far from the remembered Otsego, into the dark forest. Natty appeared erect, swift, shrewd, contented, and wise, and he had all the virtues of hand and head.²⁰ It

¹⁷Crawford, An Outline-History, 68.

¹⁸Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 44.

¹⁹Cowie, The American Novel, 131.

²⁰Van Doren, The American Novel, 28.

may be said that the way in which Cooper contrasted Uncas and Magua, and to the extent of the contrast was overdone. Parrington feels that his romance got the better of him in dealing and describing the Mohicans, as well as his romanticizing Uncas.²¹ Along with this, is found all the paraphernalia of the Romanticist, as the splendor and the horror of war, Heyward's boldness as a soldier, Alice's timidity, and Cora's braveness, and to these Cooper added the terror of the forest and the Indian trail.²² Quinn paid a wonderful tribute to Cooper's writing skill by noting the following:

"Somehow or other we read his pages with breathless interest in the characters, not so much for the sake of them as for some reason still deeper, some innate sympathy with human hope and fear itself. We are afraid that Uncas will not arrive in time to save Cora from the Huron. We follow breathlessly while he chases Magua, who is bearing Cora away, and then, when Uncas has thrown himself down the precipice to her rescue and the tomahawk has sunk into him and the knife into Cora, we awake as it were from a spell which a great novelist has cast upon us, and even read with interest the arrangements for their respective funerals. We were more interested in the success of the main movement of the story than in the lives or fortunes of the hero or heroine. It is, in other words, more of a disappointment than a sorrow that we feel at the tragic ending of the book."²³

²¹Parrington, American Thought, I, 235.

²²Quinn, American Fiction, 59.

²³Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THE PATHFINDER

James Fenimore Cooper gathered the material and setting for The Pathfinder while he was in the navy. The narrative was really a tale of the water, because most of the action took place on Lake Ontario.¹ This setting was quite a distance north of Lake Otsego, that Cooper used in some of his other tales, but he was still using a scene in New York. Dealing with his home state was of great help to Cooper and also made his books more authentic. Fort Oswego, around which Cooper built the story, was burned by the French in 1756, to satisfy the Iroquois tribes after they had been prevented by M. de Montcalm from performing a planned massacre. It was in the year of 1759, under the supervision of General Gage, that the new Fort Oswego was planned and work was begun. Between this rebuilding of the fort and the final cession of Canada to England in 1763, Natty was supposed to have been employed as a scout on the frontier. Major Lundie had command of the fort through this period of time. It was at this time that Pathfinder, Jasper, Mabel, the old Sergeant, Cap, and Arrowhead made the cruise in the Scud, which was a most eventful element of the story.²

The entire countryside between the banks of the Mohawk

¹Quinn, American Fiction, 61.

²Cooper, The Pathfinder, Introduction, xxi.

and the shore of the lake, Ontario, was a complete wilderness." In a style very characteristic of a Romanticist, Cooper described the waterways which connected with Lake Ontario.

"It is generally known that the waters which flow into the southern side of Ontario are, in general, narrow, sluggish, and deep. There are some exceptions to this rule, for many of the rivers have rapids, or, as they are termed in the language of the region, 'rifts', and some have falls...."

"The Oswego is formed by the junction of the Oneida and the Onondaga, both of which flow from lakes; and it pursues its way, through a gently undulating country, some eight or ten miles, until it reaches the margin of a sort of natural terrace, down which it tumbles some ten or fifteen feet, to another level, across which it glides with the silent, stealthy progress of deep water, until it throws its tribute into the broad receptacle of the Ontario...."³

Cooper, through his most lasting character, the Leather-Stocking, pointed out one of the main elements of the Romantic Period, when the Pathfinder said while he talked with Cap,

"It's no great secret, though all is mystery to such as doesn't study the Lord and His mighty ways with humility and thankfulness."⁴

This was one of the most beautiful and impressive statements in the dialogue of this novel, and even in that of the entire Leather-Stocking Series. The meaning had such depth and vastness. It, too, links with the romantic belief that God reached man through nature.

³Ibid., 30.

⁴Ibid., 24.

Cooper described the great quantity and variety of trees, found in the Lake Ontario section, in a most romantic description.

"The elm with its graceful and weeping top, the rich varieties of the maple, most of the noble oaks of the American forest, with the broad-leaved linden known in the parlance of the country as the basswood, mingled their uppermost branches, forming one broad and seemingly interminable carpet of foliage, which stretched away towards the setting sun, until it bounded the horizon, by blending with the clouds, as the waves and the sky meet at the base of the vault of heaven. Here and there, by some accident of the tempests, or by a caprice of nature, a trifling opening among these giant members of the forest permitted an inferior tree to struggle upward toward the light, and to lift its modest head nearly to a level with the surrounding surface of verdure. Of this class were the birch, a tree of some account in regions less favored, the quivering aspen, various generous nut-woods, and divers others which resembled the ignoble and vulgar, thrown by circumstances into the presence of the stately and great. Here and there, too, the tall straight trunk of the pine pierced the vast field, rising high above it, like some grand monument reared by art on a plain of leaves."⁵

With this description, Cooper brought out the grandest of God's work in the forest and the greatest beauty. The person never lived who did not experience a tremendous thrill as he stood on a summit and gazed out across the panorama, and never should the person have lived that did not at once recognize this view as the work of the Master. Mabel Dunham trembled in awe as she gazed fixedly toward the horizon and in prayerful attitude knew that it was God's handiwork. She

⁵Ibid., 7.

was accompanied by three others and they too were drinking in the beauty of the landscape. Mabel was the quiet, unsophisticated, ingenuous, frank daughter of Sergeant Dunham. She was warmhearted, sincere, and had much feeling for the poetry of this beautiful earth of ours. Magnet, as her Uncle Cap called her, had little schooling, because very few girls in her day received more than the rudiments of plain English instruction. Yet, she had learned more than most girls in her station of life, due to the time she had spent with the widow of a field officer. She was not treated as a domestic but as a companion. In this position, the girl had an opportunity to lose the less refined habits and manners of her original position. Of course, even with this training she was not raised above her first status.

The other members of this party were Charles Cap, the girl's uncle, and two Indians, Arrowhead and Dew-of-June. Charles Cap was a saltwater seaman, making a journey for two purposes. One was to deliver Mabel to her sergeant father, who had seen little of the child since her mother's death, next, he was curious about "the Inland Sea" or Lake Ontario. Arrowhead and Dew-of-June were Iroquois man and wife. Arrowhead had been employed by Cap to lead them to Fort Oswego. The guide, as Magua in The Last of the Mohicans, later turned out to be a traitor and abandoned his employer.⁶

⁶Quinn, American Fiction, 61.

These Indian characters, along with Chingachgook, in this book held very minor places, however they did motivate the action in many cases. The Pathfinder, therefore, was not primarily an Indian story. Dew-of-June was a very dutiful wife and followed her warrior husband everywhere. While in contact with the white girl, she became very fond of her, which later had significance in the plot.

As the party stood enjoying the view, Mabel called their attention to smoke which was curling up above the trees. When Arrowhead was consulted, he quickly advised them it was that of a campfire. After closer consideration, he said it had been built by a white man, because it was heavy black smoke caused by wet wood burning and that an Indian would never use wet wood. The party of four advanced to determine who could be camping in this section of the forest and whether there was danger ahead for them or not. With this Cooper introduced the beginning of the action and four of the characters who were to have their places in the plot of the narrative. From this point on the action continued to rise with the suspense never ceasing. The romantic adventure which now was begun only increased after the party reached Fort Oswego, their destination.⁷

Mabel entered the encampment, having decided earlier that she was the most likely safe member if those around the

⁷Cowie, The American Novel, 142.

campfire were hostile. She was greeted by two white men and an Indian. All was safe, for these were none other than Pathfinder, Jasper Western, and Chingachgook. Pathfinder, or Natty, was a close friend of Sergeant Dunham and worked as a scout around the fort. The sergeant had sent Natty out to meet his daughter and her party, that they might be led safely to Fort Oswego. Natty at this time was in his prime, displaying his purity, self-reliance, justice, and fidelity which had been developed by the life he had led in the forest. Cooper took unusual pains to point these things out.⁸ This does not mean that Pathfinder himself was more conscious of his qualities, but that Cooper was. Another phase was added to Natty, which was a human quality brought about by his only love affair. This came toward the middle of the plot. Jasper Western was used by Cooper as a youthful hero. He was placed in the role of a trustworthy fresh-water seaman, who had piloted the Scud, the cutter on which the British expedition to the Thousand Islands took place. Even though considered trustworthy, he was at one time in the plot suspected to be a traitor; however his worth was later re-established. Chingachgook, as in the other novels of the series, was the close companion of Natty. Soon, after discussing their position, the party with their additional members were moving quietly through the

⁸Van Doren, The American Novel, 36.

forest on the last part of their treacherous journey to the fort. It had been decided that the trip would be made by canoe, and they were in this process when Chingachgook, who had been travelling on shore as a lookout, came to them telling of a fresh Mingo trail in the woods. This was the first true conflict and danger within the plot. The group found cover against the shrub-hung bank, and by camouflaging the outer side with cut shrubs, they were completely hidden from sight even to the opposite bank of the river. All passed well until a young Iroquois warrior saw wilted leaves which had been exposed to the sun. The warrior discovered them, but was unable to summons his comrades before the tomahawk of the Delaware had descended on his shaven head. The suspense came to one of its high peaks as the group quit their hiding and rushed in their canoes for the opposite side of the Oswego River. During the fierce battle that ensued, the party saw Arrowhead, who had some time before left them, among the foe. Under the shadow of darkness the group was able to leave the critical situation and pass through the actual point of danger; however this was not an easy task and Chingachgook was captured. It was necessary for the whites to push ahead regardless, so that there might still be hopes of reaching Fort Oswego with the sergeant's daughter unharmed.

A good while after Chingachgook had been left struggling with his foe in the river, he rejoined the party. The

Delaware told of his discoveries and that he had won in the battle with his foe. He also had learned that Arrowhead had betrayed them and was unable to find the reason. The Oswego rift was now at hand. Jasper and Mabel in one canoe managed to make their way through with the expert guidance of Jasper, though Natty was not so fortunate, and his canoe with Cap capsized. Cap swam to the successful boat, while Natty with Killdeer, his beloved gun, waded to shore. That very night Mabel was placed in the arms of her father when the canoe that Jasper manned reached the fort. The following morning Natty arrived at Fort Oswego.

Sergeant Dunham was one of the more significant and better characters in Cooper's narrative, and his position was excellently portrayed. He was most capable of directing himself judiciously. In the character of Sergeant Dunham, although he held low rank, there was something that commanded respect. He was very tall, was serious, and was accurate and precise in his acts and manner of thinking.⁹ Dunham always received far more true respect than any of the other subordinates from Duncan of Lundie, a Scotch laird who was in command of the post. This fact was largely due to Dunham's experience and extensive service, rather than the usual value of birth and money. His portrayal was important because of his being able in his capacity to influence the entire fort with his military opinions and, too, because he

⁹Cooper, The Pathfinder, 107.

was cast the father of a heroine.

When Mabel's party reached the fort, they learned of the voyage to the Thousand Islands that was in preparation. It was then decided that Mabel, Cap, and Natty would accompany the soldiers on this excursion. At least, they would go in company of the group until they reached the blockhouse on one of the islands where Mabel would be left under proper protection until the men returned from their march. They were to sail aboard the Scud, the cutter with Jasper Western in command. A shooting match, which was merely a sport or entertainment, was indulged in shortly before leaving the fort. The sport had little importance in connection with the plot; however it did bring out the unselfish characteristic of Leather-Stocking. Even though he was such a renowned hunter and was known to be able to hit the mark with Killdeer, he allowed Jasper to win the match. Pathfinder here sacrificed his own pleasure in order to enable a youth to build his distinction and to be awarded a type of head covering. This incident also gave the reader a hint of Jasper's admiration for Mabel, when he gave the scarf to her. She showed her feelings for Jasper by refusing to sell it to any of the officers' wives who felt it was more in keeping for them to own the scarf since Mabel in her position would never have an opportunity to wear such a thing of beauty. With all of this so clearly shown, Pathfinder did not grasp even a vague notion of the

true feeling between the youths.

After the Scud's departure, the fear of Jasper being untrustworthy was told in a conversation between Sergeant Dunham and Natty.

"To be frank with you, Pathfinder, I brought you here to talk about this very youngster. Major Duncan has received some information which has led him to suspect that Eau-douce is false, and in the pay of the enemy; I wish to hear your opinion on the subject."¹⁰

Pathfinder felt this to be an unjust situation and continued to claim the boy trustworthy. Typical of the hunter, he stood for what he believed regardless of the belief or indecision of others. It did not require much time for Natty to give his opinion, as he confidently said,

"I have known Jasper Eau-douce since he was a boy, and I have as much faith in his honesty as I have in my own, or that of the Serpent himself."

"No, no; I will believe naught against Jasper until I see it. Send for your brother, Sergeant, and let us question him in this matter; for to sleep with distrust of one's friend in the heart is like sleeping with lead there. I have no faith in your presentiments."¹¹

The suspicion that Jasper was a traitor, a French spy, and betraying his friends along with his country, produced one of the important conflicts in the book. This conflict helped to motivate the action and aided in the characterizations.

¹⁰Ibid., 181.

¹¹Ibid., 182.

On the voyage, some of the most striking incidents occurred, such as the bad storm which brought the Scud back to the fort at Oswego while the weather and the French ship Montcalm forbade the Scud to enter the harbor.¹² These circumstances would not have existed if it had not been for the conflict between Cap and Jasper. The conflict even placed Jasper under arrest as a common spy and gave the command of the Scud to Cap, who knew nothing of inland lake navigation. This character of Charles Cap, who thought fresh-water sailing immoral, was a splendid creation of Cooper's humor.¹³ Also, he was one of the best characters and one of the most realistic. He was developed as a British seaman with obstinate moods and contempt of the Colonials. His obstinate way almost wrecked the Scud, which added a vivid and dramatic episode to the story.¹⁴ After Charles Cap was convinced that he could not govern or command the Scud, Jasper was able to regain his rights and by a hard fight against the elements was able to save his ship. The following day Jasper landed the party at the blockhouse on Station Island, one of the Thousand Islands, and started his

¹²Quinn, American Fiction, 61.

¹³Cowie, The American Novel, 143.

¹⁴Quinn, American Fiction, 61.

journey back to Fort Oswego.

Mabel, looked upon by all the men as a very pleasant and enticing young girl, had three different suitors. Pathfinder had already expressed his feelings to the girl, but she had refused to consent to marriage. This had deeply hurt Sergeant Dunham, as he had chosen the hunter as an excellent match for his daughter. However, Mabel had finally promised her father that if Pathfinder was to ask her again to become his wife, she would accept. Her other two suitors were the middle-aged Quartermaster Muir and Jasper Western or "Eau-douce" as the French called him. Eau-douce meant gentle water translated directly from the French, or as the characters of Cooper's novel referred to him, Fresh-water. Jasper in the end was to be the successful lover.

The next day after the party had landed on Station Island, the British soldiers continued on their march which was to complete this British expedition. The sergeant left Mabel in the care of the quartermaster, her Uncle Cap, Jennie (her female companion), Sandy (Jennie's husband and a British soldier), and three other soldiers. During the absence of Mabel's father and his men, Dew-of-June slipped to shore and informed Mabel of her plight and great danger. June had become very fond of the white girl as they had spent so many hours together on their journey through the forest. Dew-of-June would not allow the white girl to tell any of those at the post on the island, or would not allow

her in any way to attempt to get word to the sergeant and his soldiers. She advised Mabel to stay within the blockhouse.

"Blockhouse good place to sleep, good place to stay."¹⁵ June also told Mabel that Arrowhead did not want any harm to come to the beautiful paleface girl, for he loved her. Mabel was astounded. The Indian girl told Mabel that her husband wished to obtain the white girl as a second wife, since the Indians could have more than one squaw. June informed Mabel that if there had to be another that she would want none other for a sister-wife. At once Mabel eased the Indian maiden by telling her that this could never be due to the different beliefs of the whites and Indians. June continued to warn her and suggest the blockhouse.

"Blockhouse very good; good for women. Blockhouse got no scalp."¹⁶

When the siege came against this out post, four of the six white men were instantly killed and scalped, Sandy included. Jennie rushed from the blockhouse, where she and Mabel were concealed, to the side of her dead husband and she too met with sudden death. Mabel gazed through one of the loop-holes, but Cap and Quartermaster Muir were not in sight. Later from a trap-door in the roof of the blockhouse, Mabel

¹⁵Cooper, The Pathfinder, 295.

¹⁶Ibid., 296.

saw Chingachgook approaching in a bark, and it was not long until Pathfinder arrived. Mabel felt somewhat safer with the hunter in the blockhouse. The climax was brought to its full height when Sergeant Dunham and his men reached Station Island. Mabel's father was wounded by a bullet from an Iroquois' rifle, but still was able to make the door of the blockhouse where Natty and Mabel pulled him inside. After a long battle, the whites finally overpowered the Indians and set them adrift with one paddle for each canoe, knowing that by the next morning they would land on the Canada coast. With this development Cooper commenced the denouement or the solving of all problems which were left in the plot. Of course, all weapons had been confiscated by the whites, and now Pathfinder met with Captain Sanglier, the French officer. As they talked, Arrowhead, who was still among them, killed the quartermaster with a hidden weapon, then he disappeared into the dense forest. Immediately Chingachgook was in pursuit, and so brought the death of a villain. Along with this meeting between the woodsman and the Frenchman came the information that Quartermaster Muir was the French agent. So, another of the problems was thus cleared. Jasper was once again in good standing and to be trusted.

Before the death of Mabel's father, which was brought on by the bullet wound, he requested that Natty forever care for his daughter and that they should marry as soon as they reached Fort Oswego. This was promised to be carried out.

As Natty was about to give up his beloved forest and Chingachgook for a wife and home, he found himself desperately ill at ease in love, and talked with young Jasper. It was during this discussion that he learned of Jasper's feelings for Mabel, and this made him believe, although the girl had said nothing, that she loved Jasper.¹⁷ This knowledge brought forth the final unweaving of problems. Natty surrendered the girl to a more suitable lover of her own choice, Jasper Western. Cooper realized that Pathfinder essentially belonged to the forest, and he restored him to this life of solitude before allowing marriage to domesticate him.¹⁸ Pathfinder was left, in the closing of the book, with a keen sentimental grief, but later he was to make the most of his gift in staying in the forest with his Indian friend.¹⁹ It was this renunciation by Pathfinder of his hope of winning Mabel that proved so noteworthy because it ran counter to the method of the sentimental novel of that time or period. According to the rules of this type of romance, the two youths would have sacrificed their love because of the promise the girl had made to both her father and to Pathfinder. The happiness of both lives would have

¹⁷Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 143.

¹⁸Van Doren, The American Novel, 36.

¹⁹Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 143.

been parted with for that of one.²⁰ Cooper solved the problem in a more realistic way than would have other Romanticists.

This closing finds Mabel and Jasper married for a good many years. Dew-of-June had finally gone to live with Mabel, after being coaxed away from her husband's grave by Natty. Her plight after Arrowhead's death had been much like that of the Indian maiden in William Cullen Bryant's poem The Indian Girl's Lament. The entire poem is most appropo, but due to its length, only the first three and the last verses are quoted below.

"An Indian girl was sitting where
Her lover, slain in battle, slept;
Her maiden veil, her own black hair,
Came down o'er eyes that wept;
And wildly, in her woodland tongue,
This sad and simple lay she sung:

'I've pulled away the shrubs that grew
Too close above thy sleeping head,
And broke the forest-boughs that threw
Their shadows o'er thy bed,
That, shining from the sweet southwest,
The sunbeams might rejoice thy rest.'

'It was a weary, weary road
That led thee to the pleasant coast,
Where thou, in his serene abode,
Hast met thy father's ghost;
Where everlasting autumn lies
On yellow woods and sunny skies.'

* * *

²⁰Quinn, American Fiction, 62.

'And thou dost wait and watch to meet
My spirit sent to join the blessed,
And, wondering what detains my feet
From that bright land of rest,
Dost seem, in every sound, to hear
The rustling of my footsteps near.'²¹

Cooper told at the very last of the novel that June had grieved herself to death, and finally was released to go to meet Arrowhead in the happy hunting-grounds. After Jasper had moved his family to the east coast, Mabel had an opportunity to journey into the interior. There on a lake she saw a man who she felt she knew. Upon inquiry Mabel was told it was the most renowned hunter of that portion of the state and that he was known in that region by the name of the Leather-Stocking. Thus, Cooper brought to a close The Pathfinder.

²¹William Cullen Bryant, Poetical Works, 44-45.

CHAPTER V

THE PIONEERS

James Fenimore Cooper pulled from his deep-well a setting for the novel, The Pioneers, that was closely connected with the Cooper family. Cooper's father was an energetic man, who on several occasions held office as a judge and a Congressman, but his principal occupation was that of a land agent. He purchased and sold large tracts of land. At one time there was a fifty thousand acre tract of upper New York land purchased by William Cooper from William Franklin, son of Benjamin Franklin. Soon after the birth of James F. Cooper, his father took the family and established himself on Otsego Lake in an imposing three story house, in New York state.¹ In The Pioneers we find this very house occupied by Judge Temple and his daughter. Marmaduke Temple, in the novel, had established the village of Templeton in contrast to that of Cooperstown established by William Cooper. Both, the fictional and the real, towns were located at the base of Otsego Lake where the Susquehannah River took its source. It would be utterly impossible for one to argue about the site of the narrative, since there is but one lake by this name and its being the proper source of the said river. A person today may take his map of New York and find the Otsego Lake about the center of the state, or in Otsego County. He

¹Cowie, The American Novel, 117.

will also find at the base of the lake the village of Cooperstown on the Susquehannah.

The lake received its name from the native Indian language. "Ot" meant a meeting place, while "sego" or "sago" was merely a friendly salutation, therefore the large interior body of water was dubbed Otsego. It was a lake of a thousand springs, which furnished the source of the Susquehannah which flowed southwardly until it joined the Delaware River that too took its rise in the hills of Otsego County.

James Fenimore Cooper chose an extensive district of valleys and mountains covered by natural forests and with sufficient game that a man lived without fear of poverty. At least this situation existed until Marmaduke's villagers began to rob the lands of their riches. Natty Bumppo's hut was among these hills and mountains above the lake.

Templeton was nestled at the foot of the mountains and on the shore of the Otsego Lake; however, it was across the lake from Natty's cabin. The village consisted of some fifty buildings and the Marmaduke's mansion. The people were fast clearing the trees in order to lay out new avenues. The true feeling of seeing such a place in the year 1793, cannot be experienced without reading the exact words as Cooper wrote them in 1823, so below you will find Elizabeth, Marmaduke Temple, Richard, and the black just arriving in two sleighs, as it was Christmas Eve and a heavy snow was

upon the ground.

"After winding along the side of the mountain, the road, on reaching the gentle declivity which lay at the base of the hill, turned at a right angle to its former course, and shot down an inclined plane, directly into the village of Templeton. The rapid little stream that we have already mentioned, was crossed by a bridge of hewn timber, which manifested, by its rude construction and the unnecessary size of its framework, both the value of labor and the abundance of materials. This little torrent, whose dark waters gushed over the limestones that lined its bottom, was nothing less than one of the many sources of the Susquehanna; a river to which the Atlantic herself has extended an arm in welcome. It was at this point that the powerful team of Mr. Jones brought him up to the more sober steeds of our travellers. A small hill was risen, and Elizabeth found herself at once amidst the incongruous dwellings of the village. The street was of the ordinary width, notwithstanding the eye might embrace, in one view, thousands and tens of thousands of acres, that were yet tenanted only by the beasts of the forest. But such had been the will of her father, and such had also met the wishes of his followers. To them the road that made the most rapid approaches to the condition of the old, or, as they expressed it, the down countries, was the most pleasant; and surely nothing could look more like civilization than a city, even if it lay in a wilderness! The width of the street, for so it was called, might have been one hundred feet; but the track for the sleighs was much more limited. On either side of the highway were piled huge heaps of logs, that were daily increasing rather than diminishing in size, notwithstanding the enormous fires that might be seen through every window."²

This setting of the story was most effective, because the native owners of the soil had been pressed on westward by the invading white man. Before the advance of these Europeans, all the section that contained the New England States

²Cooper, The Pioneers, 50.

and the ones just east of the mountains had made up two great nations of Indians. The two great divisions consisted of a group known as the Six Nations, and were named the Anglo-Americans, Iroquois, Mingoes, or Maqua; while the other side was made up of the Lenni Lenape, or Delawares, which also contained the Mahicanni, Mohicans, or Mohegans, and the Nanticokes, or Nentigoes. The Six Nations also included several nations of the Mohawks, the Oneidas, the Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas; later the Tuscaroras were admitted to this union. When the white man first began to push the natives back, he found the Nanticokes holding the land around the Chesapeake Bay, the Delawares all through the Delaware River area, and the Mohegans holding from the Hudson River, most of the New England state territory, to the Atlantic Ocean. As they were driven back many of their people were extinguished making it necessary for many of the tribes to ban together for additional strength. Still they were pushed farther back and many tribes simply disappeared. A sole survivor of the Mohegans remained with Natty in Cooper's pioneer setting.

In this book Cooper has dealt a great deal with American manners, the way of life, and characteristics. It was for the first time that he had delved into anything like this realistic representation. Since he had spent his childhood in the very locality which he had chosen for The Pioneers, and could, too, go back into his memory sufficiently to

gather material of the very time of his book, he could write largely from actual experience. This, of course, aided him in putting on paper the real characteristics of the frontier life. Cooper was most successful in this new venture, and is noted for the familiar realism found in The Pioneers.³ Cooper had but one method of composing his narratives, and when he left out the definite pursuit it deprived The Pioneers of a great deal. There are many exciting moments throughout the plot, but not a general suspense.⁴ The plot was a varied and unhurried unfolding of all the aspects of frontier life during the four seasons of the year in a new settlement in the year of 1793. All the way through the narrative there is too much conversation. Along with this came one of the weaknesses of The Pioneers, and that was the interruptions to relate conversations of minor characters, and the arguments, direct and implied, concerning the preservation of game, forests, and fish.

Any romance which appeared in the tale was in its plot, which was a most simple type, or in the characters.⁵ When the plot began to progress and to reach its development, the setting and characterization held a great quantity of enjoyment. Cooper took time to describe much of the pioneer

³Parrington, American Thought, 216.

⁴Trent, Editor, American Literature, 296.

⁵Van Doren, The American Novel, 26.

life, going to meeting, inn visiting, turkey shooting, fishing, and sap collecting. He also described a good deal of the native scenery. Even minor characters received lengthy descriptions. The French and Dutch elements were embodied in M. le Quoi and Major Hartmann, whose foreign accents were rather poorly produced but whose general characteristics were convincingly set forth.⁶ The Pioneers was of course the first book of the Leather-Stocking Series to be written, although it was to be the fourth book in the sequence, therefore, it was in this book that James Fenimore Cooper developed the two permanent figures of importance in fiction. These two characters were Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, the last of the Mohicans. Natty, Hawkeye, or Leather-Stocking, was presented as an old man of sixty, who linked, through his devotion to his master, Major Effingham, the colonial British tradition with the new life in the outskirts of civilization after the Revolution. Natty was the symbol of the pioneer spirit of America and yet was real.⁷ Natty was vivid, picturesque, and very attractive with his fine gift for friendship. His loyalty to Chingachgook established in this story the tone which was to prevail throughout the entire series.⁸

⁶Cowie, The American Novel, 126.

⁷Quinn, American Fiction, 57.

⁸Cowie, The American Novel, 127.

Chingachgook, in The Pioneers known as Indian John, was the only Indian to appear in this novel, and he was to a great extent contrasted to the whites, which helped to bring out the Delaware's stoicism and fidelity. Natty and Chingachgook stood together as a protest against the encroaching white man and civilization. Natty is discussed in the Virgin Land. "The character was conceived in terms of the antithesis between nature and civilization, between freedom and law, that has governed most American interpretations of the westward movement."⁹ In the hunter, Cooper developed one of the most important characters to be found in American Literature, because he was a symbol of the national experience of adventure across the continent.¹⁰

It was Christmas Eve when Cooper introduced his story and the action began. Marmaduke Temple had been to meet his daughter, Elizabeth, who was arriving from the city of New York after having finished her education there, and the father and daughter were on their way home. Judge Temple was a patron of the infant community, landed proprietor, justice of the peace, and virtual lord of the manor. Temple bought land on the New York frontier and had overseen the planting of a town on the shores of Lake Otsego. As they were making their way in a sleigh, driven by a twenty year

⁹Smith, Virgin Land, 60.

¹⁰Ibid., 61.

old black called Agamemnon, a deer which had been chased from the forest by gunfire darted across the path of the sleigh. The Judge took aim and fired. Immediately, Leather-Stocking stepped into the clearing of the trail. He too had fired on the deer and before Marmaduke. Young Oliver Edwards was among those who had attempted to fatally wound the deer. The Judge tried to claim that he had shot and killed the deer, but it was proven that his shots had gone astray, and that even one of his two shots had buried itself in Oliver's shoulder. Oliver was a young hunter, often called Young Eagle by Indian John, and was a close friend of Natty Bumppo and the Delaware. The conflict between Judge Temple and Leather-Stocking which was symbolic of the issues that were raised by the advancement of frontier settlement proved to be the emotional and literary center of the novel. The management of this theme showed some of Cooper's best writing ability. The central issue of The Pioneers remained the same throughout the entire plot from the moment Judge Temple claimed the deer when Leather-Stocking's young friend had truly shot it until the Judge actually sentenced and imprisoned the old hunter because of his resistance to the new game laws. This main issue was the old forest freedom versus the new needs and wants of a community which established the sovereignty of law over the individual.¹¹

¹¹Smith, Virgin Land, 63.

Upon finding that the young man was truly wounded, the Judge succeeded in coaxing him to go along with them for medical attention, although the youth felt it was not necessary and was reluctant. As they continued their return to Templeton, Richard Jones, second cousin of Elizabeth, Monsieur le Quoi, Major Hartman, and Mr. Grant, the clergyman, approached the Judge's sleigh from the opposite direction. In the course of their conversation and discussion about the deer on the back of Marmaduke's sleigh, the horses of Richard's sleigh about pulled it over the mountain side, but it was saved by Oliver. This deed caused a minor conflict between the two men and was to be ever present throughout the rest of the tale. After finally arriving at the Temple mansion, Dr. Todd was called in to care for Oliver's wounded shoulder. The doctor when he arrived showed very little knowledge and experience, but the job was done with the advice of Oliver and Indian John, who had arrived to dress the wound. Indian John used an ointment which caught the attention of Doctor Todd. In finding different types of wood and bark in the Mohegan's basket of healing remedies, the Doctor took possession of them. When he realized Marmaduke had been watching, he stated that they could not be of any worth, but he would take the items with him for analysis just in case they should advance the white man's knowledge.

Again Marmaduke and Oliver discussed the deer, Marmaduke attempting to purchase the deer from the youth. After the boy refused to sell the animal, the Judge sent Aggy and

a sleigh to take the boy with his deer back close to his friend's cabin, which was Natty's hut. They had agreed that Oliver would return the next day and receive further amendment for his wound. It was only because of the pretty daughter, Elizabeth, that Oliver agreed to return.

Templeton was a very busy village that night for there was to be a Christmas program directed by their new Episcopalian clergyman. Chingachgook, Natty, and Oliver attended, as well as all the townspeople. It was at this program that Louisa Grant, the minister's daughter, and Elizabeth Temple were introduced and at sight became close friends. Elizabeth Temple was one of Cooper's best heroines. She was brave and self-respecting and did not, like Louisa Grant, faint away in dangerous moments.

Captain and Mrs. (Betty) Hollister, an Irish couple, were the owners of the Bold Dragoon, an inn which all of the villagers patronized. It was here, on Christmas Eve, that Indian John became drunk. The Delaware's friend, the hunter, was always irritated by his drunkenness, but as a good, long-time friend, Natty managed to tolerate the old Indian's weakness. This night as Natty surveyed the drunken Delaware, he spoke to himself in the Delaware tongue about John.

"He is drunk and can do no harm. This is the way with all the savages; give them liquor, and they make dogs of themselves...."¹²

¹²Cooper, The Pioneers, 152.

Another minor conflict, which did not come to any importance in the plot, made itself known at the Christmas turkey shoot. The rivalry between Natty, the long experienced hunter, and Billy Kirby, who cleared land and did chopping jobs, brought about the conflict. It only added interest to the progression of the tale. Other incidents which helped to motivate the action of the plot were presented in good form by Cooper. The sonless Judge Temple invited Oliver to enter his household as a secretary; this was to help right his wrong against the youth, although it was an accidental shooting. When Oliver hesitated before accepting this offer, Richard whispered to Elizabeth,

"This, you see, Cousin Bess, is the natural reluctance of a half-breed to leave the savage state. Their attachment to a wandering life is, I verily believe, unconquerable."¹³ This again showed that Richard had never gotten over the capability that young Oliver had displayed in saving Richard's sleigh and horses from going over the side of the mountain. After consideration Oliver finally accepted the secretarial post in the household of the Judge. One of the passages which best shows Elizabeth's character and the type of girl that she was, is the one which is presented below. Her father, the Judge, warned Elizabeth not to pry into the past life of Oliver, their new secretary.

¹³Ibid., 186.

"Oh! I am not much troubled, sir, with that laudable thirst after knowledge that is called curiosity."¹⁴

Here Oliver remained until Natty became jailed, then he found it necessary to leave the Temple household in order to aid his loved friend. Before this arrest, Natty had saved Louisa and Elizabeth, when they had been out for a walk in the forest, from being killed by an infuriated panther. This confinement brought close the climax of the narrative. The thing that caused the old hunter to be imprisoned was his killing a deer out of season, then resisting the law. A representative was sent to Natty's cabin with a search warrant, but Natty would not allow Billy Kirby to enter. The hunter finally gave himself up to the law and was jailed. Later his trial was to come up. The Judge had made it appoint to be kind to Leather-Stocking, as the villagers called him, and to tolerate him and his drunken Indian friend, even though they had proved to be something of a nuisance. When Leather-Stocking killed this deer in violation of the new game law, the Judge was certain that he could manage the necessary prosecution with propriety. Elizabeth was to pay his fine, so that the old man who had saved his daughter's life would not be inconvenienced and the law too would be satisfied. All of this arrangement was spoiled when Natty refused to allow the search for the

¹⁴Ibid., 198.

deerskin. The matter, after this, was beyond the Judge's control and he sentenced Natty to an hour in the stocks and to a month's imprisonment. After he spent the time in the stocks, Natty broke jail. It was during this time that Cooper saw fit to develop the climax, and it was completed when Natty saved Elizabeth once more; this time from a fire. Indian John died shortly after the fire on the mountain. It had proven too much of a strain on the old Mohegan.

The denouement of this tale showed that Cooper was most capable in keeping a secret. His dramatic revelation of the existence of Major Effingham, long concealed by his grandson, Oliver, and by Natty, was well done.¹⁵ The action of the plot stemmed from the fact that Major Effingham had given his estate to his son on the occasion of the latter's marriage. The son in turn consigned his affairs into the hands of Marmaduke Temple, being sure to keep the arrangement secret because of Temple's Quaker allegiance. Upon the outbreak of the Revolution, Effingham the younger joined the Royalists and settled in England. After his death, his son, introduced in the story as Oliver Edwards, came to the States in search of his grandfather. With this background there was no difficulty when Edward and Elizabeth decided to marry; this move permanently united the assets of Temple and Effingham.¹⁶

¹⁵Quinn, American Fiction, 58.

¹⁶Cowie, The American Novel, 126.

The close of this novel found old Leather-Stocking mourning the death of his old Indian friend, and preparing to make the move on westward to escape the invading civilization. He had decided to go to the prairie. The plain between the Alleghenies and the Rocky Mountains was immense and extended some fifteen hundred miles east and west, and six hundred north and south, with few hills to break the levelness. Cooper compared the immensity and diversity of this landscape with that of the ocean.

"The earth was not unlike the ocean, when the restless winds are blowing heavily, after the agitation and fury of the tempest have begun to lessen. There was the same waving and regular surface, the same succession of foreign objects, and the same boundless extent to view. Indeed, so very striking was the resemblance between the water and the land, that, however much the geologist might object to an analogy of this kind, it would have been difficult for a poet not to have felt that the formation of the one had been produced by the same agency as that of the other."¹

This was an entirely different setting for Cooper to use, since his other setting had been that of the forest or the water. The author with his vivid imagination was able to convey a view of the open space which was most surprisingly accurate, although he had not seen the real prairie. In fact, he handled this mighty landscape with an unbelievable imaginative power.² James Fenimore Cooper managed to endow his analogical

¹James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie*, 5.

²Van Doren, *The American Novel*, 50.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRAIRIE

James Fenimore Cooper placed The Prairie, his last book in the sequence, in a setting of hard soil and dry grass of the plain. This plain between the Alleghanies and the Rocky Mountains was immense and extended some fifteen hundred miles east and west, and six hundred north and south, with few hills to break the levelness. Cooper compared the sameness and dreariness of this landscape with that of the ocean.

"The earth was not unlike the ocean, when its restless waters are heaving heavily, after the agitation and fury of the tempest have begun to lessen. There was the same waving and regular surface, the same absence of foreign objects, and the same boundless extent to view. Indeed, so very striking was the resemblance between the water and the land, that, however much the geologist might sneer at so simple a theory, it would have been difficult for a poet not to have felt that the formation of the one had been produced by the subsiding dominion of the other."¹

This was an entirely different setting for Cooper to use, since his other setting had been those of the forest or the water. The author with his vivid imagination was able to establish a view of the open spaces which was most surprisingly accurate, although he had not seen the real prairie. In fact, he handled this mighty landscape with an unbelievable imaginative power.² James Fenimore Cooper managed to endow his analogi-

¹James Fenimore Cooper, The Prairie, 5.

²Van Doren, The American Novel, 30.

cally described prairie with a presence as haunting as that of the forest which he had known so well in boyhood.³

This book, published in England, May, 1827, truly was a masterpiece, although the solidity of its qualities prevented it from ever becoming as popular as the more brilliant stories.⁴ In this narrative, Cooper showed a fine skill in tracing a character into old age when he with words painted the portrait of the venerable trapper, undeniably the same person who years before, in The Last of the Mohicans, had protected Heyward and the Munro sisters. Alone, this character would have sustained enough popular interest in the story. However, there were other elements which served as interest gatherers, such as the incident of kidnapping which was hinted to the reader yet securely hidden from his full knowledge, the capture and pursuit of the entire plot, the philosophy of the old trapper, the actions of the good Pawnees and the bad Sioux Indians, a raging prairie fire, and all the other complications. An imaginative reader also found a poetical rendering of the prairie landscape, a kind of group picture of elemental man with nature for a background, that hardly has been excelled in all of American Literature.⁵

³Trent, Editor, American Literature, 299.

⁴John Erskine, Leading American Novelists, 87.

⁵Ibid., 88.

The Prairie ennobled the aged Hawkeye who had gone to upper Missouri to flee civilization.⁶ Natty had withdrawn from the settlement life due to his disgust with its corruption. At this time he was eighty years old, stalwart though somewhat enfeebled, and because of his failing eyesight had had to condescend to trapping on the plains. Natty, with his old hound, Hector, roamed the distances, seldom stopping in any one place more than a month.⁷ Hector served two purposes. One was the companionship to the old man and the other was the dog's keen scent which warned him of all approaching dangers. Of course, the latter was the more essential, however the first lent a certain tenderness to the story which could not have been surpassed. The time of the novel was 1805, and at this time Natty was found surrounded by fierce mounted Indian tribes.⁸ This was another of Cooper's new devices, the swifter action brought about by the horses and their riders. The trapper's long absence from civilization had refined his speech and had almost made of him a formal philosopher of the natural life and of the true equality of all men. Natty was now charming not as a philosopher but as a touchingly weak old man, and there was

⁶Crawford, American Literature, 68.

⁷Cowie, The American Novel, 133.

⁸Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 57.

a lovely serenity to his death which brings the story to a close.⁹

The plot of the narrative was most simple. Ishmael Bush, a squatter, was moving across the plains in search of a home suited to his lawless nature, as Natty, he had been forced westward by the advancing civilization, although it was for a different reason.¹⁰ Ishmael Bush had murdered a sheriff and was engaged in a kidnaping venture which his evil brother-in-law had lured him into, when he, the crude, sluggish patriarch, with his family, was fleeing the world of title deeds and sheriffs. Even though he was impatient of rules, it was necessary for him to impose them on his sons so they could not desert him as he had done his own father. At the climax of the novel it was his job to judge all the white characters, who during fierce fighting had become his prisoners.¹¹

Bush's search for a stopping place had been almost completed when the narrative first began. Ishmael, his seven sons, his wife, his two daughters, Ellen Wade, the kidnaped Inez, and his villainous brother-in-law were seeking a camping site on the lonely prairie when they approached the old trapper with his tall, gaunt, toothless hound. Natty's frame showed that it had endured many hard-

⁹Ibid., 58.

¹⁰Erskine, American Novelists, 88.

¹¹Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 58.

ships during the more than eighty seasons and his form had withered, not wasted. The old man's dress was mainly that of skins worn with the hair to the weather. From his shoulders hung a pouch and horn, while he leaned on Killdeer, the gun which Judith Hutter had given him in The Deerslayer. The old rifle of uncommon length, like its owner, exhibited the wear of long and hard service. Natty led the group to a small prairie creek and after seeing them prepared to spend the night, he wandered into the darkness of the prairie night. This journey of Bush's group gave the plot the ground plan of the pursuit and rescue, which Cooper had previously used. However, in this book the central theme was rest instead of the former motion. The main plot was framed between the vast stillness of the not yet occupied prairie and the heroic calm of the trapper's advanced age.¹²

As Natty and his hound walked on the dry grass of the prairie that night, they came across Ellen Wade who had left the Bush encampment in order to meet her lover. Her lover was Paul Hover, a beehunter, who followed the trail due to his love for the young girl. At a short distant spot, Paul, as agreed met the two, although he was not expecting the trapper. This love affair was one of two in the story, the other being the love between the kidnaped Inez, a creole heiress of Louisiana, and Captain Duncan

¹²Erskine, American Novelists, 89.

Uncas Middleton, a recent bridegroom. Both men, therefore, were in pursuit of the travelling emigrants for the sake of rescuing their loves. In this novel Cooper kept every element of suspense which he had displayed in his earlier novels. The first conflict with savages, which brought about the beginning of the rising action and touched off the suspense of the plot, came while the three, Paul, Ellen, and Natty, were conversing after meeting. A little while before, Hector had given warning with a long pitiable bay, and apparently the Sioux Indians had heard the cry. As a bloody band of accursed Sioux came close, the three whites took cover in tall dry grass. The keen ears of the savages brought them to the exact spot where Natty and his two companions were hiding. They knew that they were captives, when Paul Hover felt a hand laid rudely on his shoulder.

"He turned his eyes upward and beheld the dark and savage countenance of an Indian gleaming full upon him. Notwithstanding the surprise and the disadvantage of his attitude, the youth was not disposed to become a captive so easily. Quicker than the flash of his own gun he sprang upon his feet, and was throttling his opponent with a power that would soon have terminated the contest, when he felt the arms of the trapper thrown around his body confining his exertions by a strength very little inferior to his own. Before he had time to reproach his comrade for this apparent treachery, a dozen Siouxes were around them, and the whole party were compelled to yield themselves as prisoners."¹³

After the Sioux Indians captured these white persons,

¹³Cooper, The Prairie, 30.

Mahtoree, the chief of these Dahcotahs, slipped into the encampment of Bush and his family. The chief refrained from killing any of the white sons, but stole all of the squatter's animals. In this way Cooper skilfully absorbed into his narrative the new and picturesque element of cattle rustling.¹⁴ As the stampeding cattle rushed by Natty, he grabbed the knife of a Dahcotah and slashed the leather strip which held the cattle in a group. Being freed the animals spread in all directions. The Sioux, immediately realizing what had been done, rushed after the loose animals, leaving their prisoners unguarded. As Natty had said,

"The reptiles have left him as hoofless as a beaver!"¹⁵ This was exactly what had happened to the squatter. Unguarded, Paul, Natty, and Ellen made their way to Bush's camp. Natty convinced him that he had nothing to do with the robbery. Natty assisted Ishmael in bringing his long journey to a close by suggesting a place for the family to settle where they had a chance of survival.

Very shortly Cooper introduced the second love affair in his story, with the appearance of Duncan Uncas Middleton. A very sweet and reminiscent scene was added when Natty realized that the young stranger, a member of the border-troops of the Confederacy, was really the grandson of

¹⁴Cowie, The American Novel, 134.

¹⁵Cooper, The Prairie, 46.

Duncan Heyward, who was the lover of Alice in The Last of the Mohicans. This was quite a touching scene, although one of great importance to the old trapper since this was the first word he had had since he had last seen the grandfather in earlier days. Natty, with his question,

"Tell me, is he they call'd Duncan, without the Uncas -- is he living?"¹⁶

learned that this old friend had long been dead. The young soldier also told the trapper of a scout's name being borne by his brother and by two of his cousins. Natty, feeling that this must have been his name, inquired,

"Do you mean the actual name itself, spelt with the very same letters, beginning with an N and ending with an L?"¹⁷

This small incident, not as significant to the plot of the story as many of the other happenings proved to be, carried its own importance. There were two ways that this meeting assisted in catching interest and adding to the quality of the narrative. In the first place, it brought out the tenderness of old age, the mellowness of a life spent in appreciation of nature and her master, which added an aesthetic quality that in no other way could have been surpassed. Secondly, this occurrence brought to light a

¹⁶Cooper, The Prairie, 102.

¹⁷Ibid., 103.

connection with bygone days, the grandson of a personal friend, a tie stronger than strangers, the friendship that added great feeling to the book. It was Duncan Uncas Middleton, who stood on one side of the old man as he faced his final breath on earth, that carried old Killdeer, pouch, and horn back to Otsego Lake as the old man had asked.

The rising action was aided by the discovery of Asa's body, the oldest son of the prairie pirate. It was a pitiable scene where two of the other sons laid the body of the lost Asa at the feet of the pale and insensible mother. The matter was complicated by the accusation made upon the Leather-Stocking. Old Ishmael was determined that he sometime would have the opportunity to punish the trapper for the death of his son. While Esther, Ishmael, and their other sons were completing the burial of Asa, Ellen Wade and the daughters of the family stood guard over the squatter's victim and belongings. After some little battle had passed, Middleton regained his bride, Inez, and Hover talked Ellen into quitting the Bush family and leaving with him. In this way came to a close the pursuit of both young men, and all that remained for them to execute was the protection of the girls. Before the squatter returned, the newly formed party escaped. The first meeting with the young Pawnee brave, Hard-Heart, was made as the group was making its way to the east. The author placed this development in the plot during the escape of the white-party from Ishmael Bush

as explanation for the friendly meeting to take place after the prairie fire. The Pawnee later became the adopted son of the old trapper. A true and faithful son that he was, he helped Duncan Middleton support his beloved white father in the final and glorious closing scene.

Added excitement was woven into the fabric of the novel with the stampeding buffalo. The suspense rose with each cloud of dust kicked up by the on-coming beasts. With only a small thicket for protection from the snorting, bellowing, terrorized animals, stood Ellen, Inez, Dr. Battius and his burro, Asinus, Paul, Middleton, and Natty. It seemed that they were to perish, but just as the suspense reached the height of this incident all was saved.

"The old man, who had stood all this while leaning on his rifle, and regarding the movements of the herd with a steady eye, now deemed it time to strike his blow. Levelling his piece at the foremost bull with an agility that would have done credit to his youth, he fired. The animal received the bullet on the matted hair between his horns, and fell to his knees: but shaking his head he instantly arose, the very shock seeming to increase his exertions. There was now no longer time to hesitate. Throwing down his rifle, the trapper stretched forth his arms, and advanced from the cover with naked hands directly towards the rushing column of the beasts.

The figure of a man, when sustained by the firmness and steadiness that intellect can only impart, rarely fails of commanding respect from all the inferior animals of the creation. The leading bulls recoiled, and for a single instant there was a sudden stop to their speed, a dense mass of bodies rolling up in front, until hundreds were seen floundering and tumbling on the plain. Then came another of those hollow bellowings from the rear, and set the herd again in motion. The

head of the column, however, divided. The immovable form of the trapper cutting it, as it were, into two gliding streams of life. Middleton and Paul instantly profited by his example, and extended the feeble barrier by a similar exhibition of their own persons."¹⁸

When the dust had cleared, the group saw the mounted Sioux Indians on the trail of the buffalo. As the Indians retraced their steps, the whites were discovered and became captives. The Sioux chief, Mahtoree, mounted all his prisoners except Dr. Obed Battius who rode his own Asinus. Doctor Battius, a pedant and a coward, was intended as a figure to supply diversion much the same as the character David Gamut in *The Last of the Mohicans*.¹⁹

Taking their captives, the Sioux made way to Bush's dwelling in order to acquire the rest of the family's worldly belongings. They arrived just in time to encounter Bush and his sons returning after giving chase to the whites that were now the prisoners of the Indians. As the Indians were commanded by Mahtoree to move in closer to the Bushes, the whites escape on horseback. This proved to be added suspense, and was the action to lead to the grass fire. The group finally reached a stretch of tall grass and there made preparations to spend the remainder of the night. Upon awakening they realized that the Indians had found their hiding place and had fired the prairie entrapping them.

¹⁸Cooper, The Prairie, 185.

¹⁹Cowie, The American Novel, 134.

Natty threw up a backfire which cut a path of escape for them. As they were pushing forward on the smoldering path, they came across a horse that had suffocated in his bed of grass. By the side of the carcass was found the print of an Indian moccasin, showing that someone had attempted to raise the horse in time for escape, but had failed. A few steps farther brought into view a buffalo. After they had approached what seemed to be a dead buffalo it proved to have neither hoof nor head. Closer inspection revealed that it was the hiding place of Hard-Heart. Just before the fire had approached he had crawled under a buffalo skin which had saved him from the flames. The group together pushed ahead to discover another place of concealment, even though the broad, flat prairies offered few of such places.

The climax was reached when again the group was captured by the Indians. The two hostile tribes fell into open combat, and Hard-Heart managed to kill his opponent, Mahortee. Few of the Sioux escaped with their lives, and the remanent tribe began their retreat north. All happened so suddenly that it left the whites in the hands of Bush and his family, who had joined the forces of the Sioux. The captives' transfer brought about the denouement. Ishmael Bush became the judge and began to administer justice for the murder of his son Asa. When the murderer was revealed to be Esther's brother, Abiram, Ishmael and his wife consulted the few

scriptures, with which they were familiar, and decided Abiram must die. Abiram finally hung himself. The night of the hanging in a setting of wind and drifting clouds, Ishmael and his wife returned to the place of execution, cutting down the swinging body and burying it.²⁰ The Bush family was last seen making its way back to the east, the land of the settlements. Ishmael's wife had clung to her mate and her sons with a tigerish instinct that left her when she lost her son, Asa, and her brother, Abiram. She retreated dumbly from the scene in a vast silent grief.²¹ Esther became one of the most memorable characters of Cooper's women. One of Cooper's greatest achievements in The Prairie was Ishmael Bush and his family. "In their slow violence and unlovely ways they are at one with the unlovely ominous country of which they are the ultimate conquerors."²² This family was perhaps made up of the most forceful figures in any of his works, at least on the physical side. They were magnified in the enchanted prairie light, as rude gods of the early world, dim-souled, misty, and vast.²³

²⁰Smith, Virgin Land, 222.

²¹Van Doren, The American Novel, 31.

²²Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 59.

²³Erskine, Leading American Novelists, 89.

The best executed and the crowning glory of The Prairie was the death scene of the old trapper, which also brought about the closing of the novel. Poor old Natty sat awaiting his death, surrounded by Pawnee chieftains. Middleton and Paul Hover arrived in time to find him before death and received his last messages. He wanted Oliver Effingham, the descendant of his old master, to have his precious rifle, pouch, and horn. Middleton promised the old man that he would take them himself to Oliver. Natty left his traps to his adopted son, the Pawnee, Hard-Heart.²⁴ The years had taken toll of the weary octogenarian, and he was fully ready to meet his master.

"The trapper had remained nearly motionless for an hour. His eyes, alone, had occasionally opened and shut. When opened, his gaze seemed fastened on the clouds, which hung around the western horizon, reflecting the bright colours and giving form and loveliness to the glorious tints of an American sunset. The hour -- the calm beauty of the season -- the occasion, all conspired to fill the spectators with solemn awe. Suddenly, while musing on the remarkable position in which he was placed, Middleton felt the hand which he held grasp his own with incredible power, and the old man, supported on either side by his friends, rose upright to his feet. For a moment he looked about him, as if to invite all in presence to listen (the lingering remnant of human frailty), and then, with a fine military elevation of the head, and with a voice that might be heard in every part of that numerous assembly, he pronounced the word,

'Here!'"²⁵

²⁴Quinn, American Fiction, 60.

²⁵Cooper, The Prairie, 358.

Everything was carried out as the old trapper had wished it, and his grave was made beneath the shade of some noble oaks. Middleton placed the simple inscription below the name on the stone, "May no wanton hand ever disturb his remains!"²⁶

²⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

James Fenimore Cooper holds an important place in our literature for which he does not always get full credit. Cooper, in many respects, was to the American novel what Scott was to the British novel. In fact, Cooper's service to the fiction of America was even greater than that of Scott's. Cooper, with his followers, actually established novel writing in American Literature, while Scott merely restored to favor a literary form which had once been great but had ceased to be used.¹ The frontier with which Cooper worked had offered many, many scenes and plots which were unused and sterile until he breathed the breath of life into a frontier character, whose deeds proved to be the thread of these plots.² There were four formative factors for the character of Natty Bumppo. They were his youthful memory of a real character, the Daniel Boone legend, the idea of the natural man, and the idealistic conception of American manhood.³ Natty was an expert marksman and a rough woodsman, yet he was a gentleman at heart, noble, true, kind hearted, and tender. In fact, Leather-Stocking was so good

¹Lillie Deming Loshe, The Early American Novel, 84.

²Lucy Lockwood Hazard, The Frontier in American Literature, 105.

³Crawford, American Literature, 67.

with his gun that he performed miracles that sportsmen cannot accept. Another fault with this widely known character was that on one page he would speak in the uncouth dialect of the trapper, and on the next in the best literary English.⁴ This was one of Cooper's great faults. Leather-Stocking was the most original figure in American fiction that was ever created and one of the finest.⁵ Natty in The Deerslayer, the last of the five book series to be written by Cooper, was free of all life's hampering restrictions and had the gift of youth not as the young would live it but as an old man would dream of it. The grace of this character was in keeping clear of civilization's responsibilities and errors and in never having become entangled. The forests and the vast plains were both scenes of horror and violence due to the deeds of other white characters in the stories, but to Leather-Stocking these places were good retreats from the pressure of reality. As Natty moved from one setting to another he always absorbed the habits and traits of the entirely different regions.⁶ Natty stood as a protest, on behalf of simplicity and perfect freedom, against encroaching law and order.

⁴Richard Burton, Literary Leaders of America, 52.

⁵Loshe, Early American Novel, 89.

⁶Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, 149.

Most critics have referred to Cooper's Indians as the "noble savages".⁷ Cooper's Indians have caused more discussion than any of his other characters. It has been an endless debate. The discussion has raged as to whether or not they were true to life. Since some of the Indians were represented as good and some bad, probably they were reasonably close to average at that time.⁸ The fact that Cooper divided his Indians into these good and bad tribes, as the Delawares and the Mingoes, the Pawnees and the Sioux, would be but the expression of a commonplace familiar to anyone who took the trouble to read a few volumes of frontier travels.⁹

"As a GOOD child is conventionally understood to be one who does not trouble his elders, so to Cooper or to the frontier trapper, the GOOD Indian was one who did not trouble the Americans. Cooper makes it clear that even these GOOD Indians are not to be judged by the white man's standards of morality. Hawkeye frequently apologizes for the boasting or the barbarity of his Indian comrades by remarking that these traits are 'a red man's gifts'."¹⁰

It is true that Cooper did idealize the Indians, there could be no doubt about it, but the author saw them through a romantic mist of poetry.¹¹ But regardless what has been

⁷Van Wyck Brooks, New England Indian Summer, 182.

⁸Russell, American Literature, 255.

⁹Hazard, Frontier in American Literature, 100.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Burton, Literary Leaders, 52.

said about these characters, it is fully possible that the Indians before the white man's firewater had begun to do its work deserved Cooper's praise.¹²

Cooper was never known to have interwoven long, descriptive passages about nature that did not have an immediate bearing upon the following events and the development of the entire plot. Many of his Romantic contemporaries indulged in writing about nature and added it without purpose to their works. The only explanation for such a practice of these enthused writers was their love for the great outdoors. Cooper cared little for scenery and used it mainly to forward the action of his plots. The reader who does not read the description of the forest is often surprised at the appearance of a band of fierce Indians coming from nowhere at all. They were hiding in that particular forest scene. If they had not been there, Cooper would not have described the scene.¹³ The descriptions of Cooper did not have the elaboration of pictorial effect common in modern descriptive writing, but they were unsurpassed in poetic dignity, and in their impression of the silence and mystery of the great forests.¹⁴ The methods which James Fenimore Cooper used in his descriptions were very simple and he used little enumeration of

¹²Ibid., 53.

¹³Blankenship, American Literature, 256.

¹⁴Loshe, Early American Novel, 90.

minor detail and very few colorful words. He obtained the most magnificent effects of space, mass, and atmosphere in his forest scenes. While Cooper was not a master of style, he showed vigorous, fluent, and admirable qualities. Many times he showed marked merits of picturesqueness and power in his writing. The most praised parts of his work were the descriptions and sometimes the dialogue.¹⁵ Also, much credit should be given to Cooper, due to the fact that he did create characters that lived.

As for the plots of Cooper's Leather-Stocking Series, they were for the most part the pursuit and rescue type. The plot found in The Last of the Mohicans would be an excellent example. Two sections were found in the plot. The first gave the adventures of Heyward, the sisters, and their guides on the perilous journey to Fort William Henry. The second dealt with the pursuit of Le Renard Subtil and his captives after the massacre. With the exception of the brief pause in the doomed fort, the novel told of a race or pursuit. Cooper excelled in this type of adventure. The woodcraft of Hawkeye and the Indians aided in holding the interest along the chase.¹⁶ The action of the five novels in the Leather-Stocking Series covered a period of more than

¹⁵Burton, Literary Leaders, 53.

¹⁶Erskine, American Novelists, 77.

half a century, and showed how the Indian was ever driven west by the approaching steps of civilization. English writers or critics praised Cooper for his knowledge of human nature, his invention, his talent for description, and the refined power and delicacy which he displayed in his delineation of the female character. These praises are those which our own later critics deny him, and for the absence of which he is no longer read with pleasure by cultivated readers out of their teens. His characters showed no development; they were ready made from the start; his heroes always behaved with intrepidity and coolness in every situation, and his women always lived up to the author's standard of feminine meekness and decorum.¹⁷ It is wholly true that the struggles of the early settlers with the Indians were definitely Cooper's territory.

The fame of James Fenimore Cooper will always rest on the five books of the Leather-Stocking Series which gave a broad and noble picture of both the woodsman and the Indian. After studying the series, it is realized that Cooper was not a master of style. The author's haste and lack of revision are quite noticeable in the construction of his novels. All too often exciting incidents occur more closely together than is believable. In this sense Cooper's realistic element is lost. His stories frequently end

¹⁷Mary Fisher, A General Survey of American Literature, 81.

abruptly and with things more or less at loose ends. Although his style of writing tends to be weak, credit must be given Cooper for his excellent descriptions and interesting dialogues. Cooper's reputation has risen of late, because a study of his social criticism shows his penetrating mind, because of his epic treatment of the frontier in the Leather-Stocking Series, and because he began the realistic sea story. His stories will last through centuries to come and will never cease to hold their important place in American Literature.

----- The Leather-Stocking Series. New York, American Publishers Corporation, 1911.

----- The Red Rover. Chicago, Doubleday, Page & Company, N.Y.

----- The Two Admirals. New York, The General Book Company, 1911.

Jewell, Alexander. The Rise of the American Novel. New York, American Book Company, 1913.

Crawford, Matthew W. Outline-History of American Literature. New York, Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1911.

Erskine, John. Studies in American Navels. New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1911.

Fisher, Mark. A Systematic Survey of American Literature. Second Edition. Chicago, A. C. McArthur & Company, 1901.

Grossman, James. The American Novel. The American Men of Letters Series. New York, William Sloane Associates, 1911.

Hazard, Lucy Lockwood. The Frontier in American Literature. New York, Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1911.

Loeb, Miss Deane. The Early American Novel. New York, Columbia University Press, 1911.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Blankenship, Russell, American Literature. New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1949.
- Brooks, Van Wyck, New England Indian Summer. New York, E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1940.
- Bryant, William Cullen, Poetical Works. New York, D. Appleton & Company, 1879.
- Burton, Richard, Literary Leaders of America. New York, The Chautauqua Press, 1903.
- Cooper, James Fenimore, The Deerslayer. Chicago, Donohue Brothers, N.d.
- The Last of the Mohicans. Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin & Company, 1876.
- The Pathfinder. New York, American Publishers Corporation, N.d.
- The Pioneers. Chicago, Donohue, Henneberry & Company, N.d.
- The Prairie. New York, The Federal Book Company, N.d.
- Cowie, Alexander, The Rise of the American Novel. New York, American Book Company, 1948.
- Crawford, Bartholow V., Outline-History of American Literature. New York, Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1949.
- Erskine, John, Leading American Novelists. New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1910.
- Fisher, Mary, A General Survey of American Literature. Second Edition. Chicago, A. C. McClurg & Company, 1901.
- Grossman, James, James Fenimore Cooper. The American Men of Letters Series. New York, William Sloane Associates, 1949.
- Hazard, Lucy Lockwood, The Frontier in American Literature. New York, Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1941.
- Loshe, Lillie Deming, The Early American Novel. New York, Columbia University Press, 1907.

Parrington, Vernon Louis, Main Currents in American Thought.
New York, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1930.

Quinn, Arthur Hobson, American Fiction, An Historical and
Critical Survey. New York, D. Appleton-Century Company,
1936.

Smith, Henry Nash, Virgin Land. Cambridge, Massachusetts,
Harvard University Press, 1950.

Trent, William P., John Erskine, Stuart P. Sherman, and
Carl Van Doren, Editors, The Cambridge History of American
Literature. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1947.

Van Doren, Carl, The American Novel, 1789-1939. New York,
The Macmillan Company, 1947.

