

COOPER'S MYTHIC HERO

THE LEATHERSTOCKING TALES:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF
COOPER'S MYTHIC HERO

by

A. W. WATSON, B.A.

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AUTHOR: A. W. Watson, B.A. (University of York,
England)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. J. Sigman

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The paper which follows develops from the apparent divergence in concerns and intentions between Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales and the remainder of his works. Such divergence has led Parrington and others to perceive "two Coopers" instead of one. By tracing the development of the hero within the Leatherstocking Tales, this paper attempts to reconcile these divergencies; realize the fullness of the myth; and isolate the principal concern which informs all of Cooper's work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
I The Hero, Society and Nature	5
II America and Europe	27
III Before White Civilization	53
IV The Status of the American Hero	79
Bibliography	102

INTRODUCTION

The works of James Fenimore Cooper have long enjoyed widespread popularity. In spite of this fact, critics are divided about the nature of Cooper's strength and achievement. This situation derives largely from the fact that different works within his corpus appear to have little in common. Much of his writing, such as The American Democrat and Home as Found, has the appearance of hard-headed political and social comment. On the other hand, the Leatherstocking Tales stand out as an example of lyrical beauty which seem totally removed from his other works.

Some critics do attempt to perceive centralizing themes to Cooper; one such is Russell Kirk, but his comments do not seem incisive: "The regular aim of his literary endeavours was to demonstrate how any society, if it would be civilized, must submit to moral discipline, permanent institutions, and the beneficent claims of property."¹ Most other critics centralize their interest around one or other aspect, but even then do not seem to be in agreement. Samuel Clemens light-heartedly parodied the whole Leatherstocking series in his essay "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses".²

¹ Russell Kirk, The Conservative Mind (London, 1954), p.177.

² Reprinted in K. S. Lynn, ed., The Comic Tradition in America (New York, 1958).

R. W. B. Lewis calls the Leatherstocking series a beautiful "dream-legend";¹ and Lawrence instructs his reader to read the Tales "as a lovely myth".² Fiedler delves deeper into the substance of the series and decides that the novels contain "a secret theme".³ Each observation is relevant in a different way, but the only one which sheds any substantial light is Lawrence's injunction to read the Leatherstocking Tales as myth.

This is the basis of Cooper's achievement in the Tales, and by analyzing the extent and the basis of the myth which he created, it is possible to see the Tales in the context of Cooper's thought as a whole. As a writer who is primarily a myth-maker, Cooper stands outside of the area usually of interest to the critic. He is of less interest artistically than mythically.

The subject of the myth which Cooper gave to America was the fate of the European consciousness when transferred to America, and the ways in which this consciousness had to be modified to adapt to the American situation.

Robert Graves sees myth as a necessary aspect of any culture, incorporating a body of knowledge concerning pre-existent order "to answer the sort of awkward questions that children ask".⁴ The most fundamental of such questions are "'Who made the World? How will it end? Who was the first

¹ R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago, 1965), p.102.

² D. H. Lawrence, "Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels", in Anthony Beal, ed., D. H. Lawrence: Selected Literary Criticism (London, 1961), p.327.

³ Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, 1960), p.172.

⁴ Robert Graves, Introduction to Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology (London, 1959), p.v.

man?'" Perceiving how "myths develop as culture spreads",¹ Graves points out how they become particularized, and therefore become means "to justify an existing social system and account for traditional rites and customs".² On this level, therefore, the function of myth is cultural, its basis being firmly in the society with which it is concerned.

Such is the case with the myth of America which Cooper forged in the Leatherstocking Tales. Graves calls myth "a dramatic shorthand record of such matters as invasions, migrations, dynastic changes, admission of foreign cults, and social reforms".³ Cooper's "dramatic shorthand record" of the admission of white culture into America centres around one character: the mythic hero of the Leatherstocking Tales who, for Cooper, represents the idealized prototype of the white, Christian, ex-European consciousness translated into the American wilderness. The Leatherstocking has an almost super-human dimension consistent with the magnitude of his prototypal position; around him, in the Tales, a situation develops to clarify the precise nature of the position he occupies.

This paper attempts to trace the way in which the full status of the hero becomes apparent; and to see the ways in which the underlying themes of the myth are common to the remainder of Cooper's work. Of these themes, the most

¹ Ibid., p.vi.

² Ibid., p.v.

³ Ibid., p.viii.

important are his passionate love and concern for America. Chapter I deals with the emergence of the mythic hero in The Pioneers, where Cooper's concerns were originally more oriented towards a literal approving exposition of social order. Chapter II traces the specialized distinction between America and Europe which Cooper erects, especially in The Prairie. Chapter III discusses the light in which Cooper sees the Indians, the race with which white civilization must come to terms. Chapter IV focuses on The Deerslayer, the last book of the series, in which Cooper expounds most fully the white, Christian characteristics of his mythic hero.

CHAPTER I

When Cooper began to write, there was little native American literature. The American novel-reading public was served principally by European authors, and it was a consciousness of this fact that prompted Cooper to begin writing. The story of his indignant resolution to emulate a European work of fiction he was currently reading¹ seems drawn from the pages of one of his own most melodramatic stories. But it is important that the influences to which he was subject were primarily English, and even the titles of his early works are reminiscent of those of English novels then in vogue. Thus, it is not surprising that he should come to be styled "The American Scott", drawing heavily as he did on the adventure story techniques of the romancer of the Scottish border country. The manners of his characters are based on those of Scott and also of Jane Austen: such are the resemblances between the style and manners of Austen's Persuasion and Cooper's Precaution that Leslie Fiedler is not alone in confusing the titles.²

At a time when America was most self-consciously asserting its independence from English government and

¹ Most critics suggest that this was Jane Austen's Persuasion.

² Fiedler actually does attribute Persuasion to Cooper in Love and Death, p.179.

traditions, the American public was beguiled by the works of the contemporary English writers, and even Cooper, as whole-hearted a patriot as any, employed the device of suggesting English authorship for his first novel. Thereby, he hoped it would be received more congenially.

As well as the lack of an indigenously American literary tradition, Cooper felt the need for an established American culture to provide the material for a novelist to work with. In his Notions of the Americans Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor he laments the lack of material available to the historian, the satirist, the romancer, or the moralist.¹ Because of the dearth of American material and literary precedent, Cooper's writing took a direction which places him in a tradition, as Fiedler sees it, which includes Scott, Poe, Mrs. Radcliffe and "Monk" Lewis.²

For other reasons, English culture attracted Cooper: the European way-of-life squared with his social convictions, if not his democratic, political philosophy. Had Cooper been born English and not American, it would not be difficult to imagine him enjoying the urbane conversation in the coffee-houses of Bath.

In America, Cooper's political situation was delicate: he was a powerful land-owner whose estates were leased to farmers who had fought to overthrow the landlordship of the

¹ J. F. Cooper, "Notions of the Americans" reprinted in American Lit. Survey, II, (New York, 1966), p.75.

² Fiedler, Love and Death, pp.170-184.

detested English sovereign. He was accustomed to all the luxury to which the rich of that period had access. His social position was an aristocratic carry-over into a society where lives were quite literally mortgaged, under the land-lease arrangement, gain no more than a frugal sufficiency.

Cooper had little trouble in justifying his social position to himself; he gave no thought to the fact that he might appear to be a representative of overthrown European culture. On the contrary, he was adamant that landed gentlemen such as he could exert a salutary influence from above, and act as a caveat against the simplistic democratic principle of the straightforward rule of the majority. In The American Democrat, Cooper's formulation of the position of the gentleman in a democratic society, he states that such a figure,

recognizing the right of all to participate in power, will be more liberal in his general sentiments, a quality of superiority in itself; but in conceding this much to his fellow man, he will proudly maintain his own independence of vulgar domination as indispensable to his personal habits. The same principles and manliness that would induce him to depose a royal despot would induce him to resist a vulgar tyrant.¹

Cooper's father, William Cooper, enabled his family to enjoy a life of colonial ease and sufficiency. He owned large tracts of land in New York State which his

¹ Quoted in American Lit. Survey, II, p.88.

sons inherited after his death in 1809. William Cooper had been a land speculator, a "shrewd operator".¹ Sometimes such people, "had ideas of baronial grandeur, insisting on leases rather than sales in fee simple and reserving the choicest sites for their own use".² The Pioneers is close in many aspects to the situation in Cooperstown in which James grew up. The township of Templeton is reminiscent of Cooperstown; Judge (William) Cooper, unlike the unscrupulous dealers mentioned above, was probably quite like the beneficent Judge Temple, amiable, rich and concerned for the community.

James Grossman's biography of Cooper and Edwin Cady's book, The Gentleman in America, both show Cooper to be strongly conservative, clinging to the Establishment of the nascent society around him. He staunchly defended the prerogative of the landlord class, in an age of abundance, to lease their land rather than sell. The Anti-Rent movement, an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the exploiting landlords, prompted Cooper's reply in the form of The Littlepage Manuscripts, three books devoted to upholding the merits of the system. Cooper, whose whole later life was devoted to controversy, political wrangling and litigation, was never averse to making political comments, even in his non-political fictional works; in the Anti-Rent trilogy he merely casts a landlord-

¹ L. H. Butterfield, "Cooper's Inheritance", in M. Cunningham, ed., James Fenimore Cooper: A Re-Appraisal (Cooperstown, 1954), p.376.

² Ibid.

tenant conflict into a fictional situation to demonstrate the infallible morality of the land-lease arrangement.

Satanstoe and The Chainbearer, the first two books of the trilogy, withstand critical analysis, though all three give more or less the same impression of being no more than a mechanical working out of a prearranged solution. For Cooper, there was only one side to the argument: he is a great pains to point out that every tenant has the opportunity to purchase, if not the land he wants, then certainly equally good land, at a very nominal price. In almost all cases, he shows the tenants to be niggardly or grasping people who are attracted to the idea of leasing rather than buying by the spurious advantage of being able to live rent-free for the first five years. Squire Newcombe in The Chainbearer is a good example of such a tenant: the lease on his property was to expire twenty-one years after the death of three people whom he was to nominate. Being a blackguard, as all who are opposed to the system necessarily are in the novel, he nominated his three children, only to be eventually frustrated by the death of all three in early childhood. Mordaunt Littlepage, the hero of the novel and executor of the estate on which Newcombe lives, offers to renew the lease:

"Now the only inducement I have for offering the terms I do, is the liberality that is usual with landlords; what is concluded is

conceded as no right, but as an act of liberality."¹ Thus he illustrates Cooper's agrarian ideal. Even worse than the rapacious tenants are the lawless squatters, usually immigrants from the New England states who come to "York" to plunder someone else's property and then move on, invariably one pace in front of the forces of law and order. Such a character in The Chainbearer is old Thousandacres, whose morality and dour patriarchal family system are reminiscent of those of Ishmael Bush in The Prairie, though pale and lacking in interest by comparison.

Conceptually opposed to the greedy tenants and lawless squatters is the old surveyor after whom the book is named. After heroic service to his country in the war for independence, the Chainbearer spends his life running lines of demarcation between different properties. Being no arithmetician, he is unable to do the actual surveyor's job, and must employ a surveyor while he acts as assistant by carrying the chain. Symbolically, he is a physical representation of truth, faithfulness and passive obedience to a pre-existing order. As such, it is he who repudiates the anarchic claims of the squatters that, "Possession is everything in settling land titles."² In his broken English, Cooper's

¹ J. F. Cooper, The Chainbearer (New York; Mohawk Ed., u.d.), p.191.

² Ibid., p.326.

representation of a Dutch accent, he says:

"Got help t'e men, t'en, t'at haf to carry chain between you and your neighpours, T'ousand acres; ... On your toctrine, not'in woult pe settlet, and all woult be at sixes and sevens."¹

The Anti-Rent trilogy was published in 1845-6, twenty-five years after Cooper first began writing, but the stiltedness of the style and the obviousness of the plots make the three books minor as works of literature, if significant for what they reveal about their author. The manners of the characters have little to do with frontier society, and the events of the plot turn out in accordance with a completely hierarchical social plan. In The Chainbearer the wealthiest and best-deserving gentleman is rewarded with the hand of the prettiest and most vivacious young lady. When it comes to marrying off the minor characters, each match is made with strict regard for social decorum, and where a dowry is wanting it is magically supplied through the death of an old and forgotten aunt in England.

It is typical of Cooper to extol the virtues of landownership and the ideal of agrarian gentility. A staunch democrat he may have been, but his conception of democracy, as we know from The American Democrat, included some very aristocratic notions. The discrepancy between Cooper's enthusiastic approval of democracy and his hierarchical

¹ Ibid.

inclinations are parodied by D. H. Lawrence in his famous critique of the Leatherstocking Tales:

"In short," he says in one of his letters, "we were at table two counts, one monsignore, an English Lord, an Ambassador and my humble self."

Lawrence comments caustically: "Were we really!"¹

Much of Cooper's approval for a natural aristocracy was based upon his belief that it was beneficial to society, and also that social stratification was inevitable. As he says in the American Democrat:

Some men fancy that a democrat can only be one who seeks the level, social, mental and moral, of the majority, a rule that would at once exclude all men of refinement, education and taste from the class. These persons are enemies of democracy, as they at once render it impracticable... Such is not the intention of liberty, whose aim is to leave every man to be the member of his own acts; denying hereditary honors, it is true, as unjust and unnecessary, but not denying the inevitable consequences of civilization.²

Both in his fiction and in his life, the idea of the gentleman, the natural aristocrat, characterized by material success, sensitivity and moral integrity attracted Cooper. Such a person, he maintained, was not only allowable within a

¹ D. H. Lawrence, "Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels", p.314.

² Quoted in American Lit. Survey, II, p.86.

democratic society but desirable.

In the light of such interests, his attraction to the frontier seems unlikely, but not only was Cooper drawn creatively by the frontier situation, but this area provided him with material for the most powerful and the most lasting of his fictional production. The first book of the series about the American frontier, The Pioneers, is much closer to a discussion of things as he knew them. It can be interpreted as being largely biographical because of the resemblances between Judge Temple and his father, and between Templeton and Cooperstown. Formally the plot is constructed around the hero, Oliver Effingham, and the heroine, Elizabeth Temple, who eventually marry. As in so many of his novels, the plot consists only of a rehearsal of the complications which prevent the hero and heroine from marrying at the outset. During the events which precede the final union Cooper fills in much of the social background of the frontier settlement. He was interested in the frontier since this was such a tremendously important part of contemporary American life, but at this stage his interest had a distinct bent. Later he defined the frontier as "those distant and ever receding borders which mark the skirts and announce the approach of the nation, as moving mists precede the signs of day."¹ But the characters of The Pioneers exist in a more nearly

¹ J. F. Cooper, The Prairie (New York, 1960), p.73.

civilized environment, one with more direct relevance to the experience of the author.

As far as Cooper was concerned, the process of settlement occurred in three distinct phases. In Home as Found he expounds the concept which lies beneath the whole of the construction of The Pioneers: the first stage was one of mutual help as the settlers established physical stability; the second was a period of competition as the greedy and the vulgar sought to outdo one another; finally virtue and merit would win through and a tangible social order would be established.¹ Pursuing this notion of the tripartite evolution of civilization, Cooper probes the morals and manners of the frontier settlement, presenting the aristocratic, humanistic apogee of his ideals in the person of Judge Temple. In this regard, his considerations in The Pioneers are close to his discussion of the Effinghams in the later Littlepage Manuscripts and coincide with beliefs he espoused throughout his life.

At the beginning of The Pioneers, Judge Temple is seen as he who can eventually bring about a situation in which, "men and things come within the control of more general and regular laws"², and in which, more especially, there will be a "division into castes that are more or less rigidly maintained,

¹ J. F. Cooper, Home as Found (New York, 1961), pp.162-164.

² Ibid., p.162.

according to circumstances".¹ In The Pioneers, therefore, Cooper was engaging a problem with a two-fold interest for him: that of an emergent aristocratic society, and also that of dealing with a fundamentally American problem in a location drawn from his own experience.

The basic premise of Judge Temple's theory of civilized man is that "Society cannot exist without wholesome restraints."² These he attempts to impose upon his fellow settlers with varying degrees of success. And, by and large, the majority of his proposals do appear as "wholesome" as he intended them to be. Although Cooper briefly undermines the structure of his own approval for Judge Temple by showing him constricted by his reliance upon trial by jury (to which Cooper strongly objected himself) the Judge is originally conceived as the moral norm of the novel. He is generous, pleasant, considerate, and has all the other attendant virtues of the beneficent legislator. He is contrasted throughout the novel with his cousin, Squire Jones, whose character is full of antithetical faults: rashness, bad judgement and self-advertisement, which Judge Temple significantly lacks. Jones fulfils the elementary function of demonstrating how admirable his cousin is at all levels: a good father, a loyal friend, a strict legal practitioner, and an advantageous acquaintance.

¹ J. F. Cooper, Home as Found (New York, 1961), pp.162-164.

² J. F. Cooper, The Pioneers (New York, 1964), p.369.

The point of view of the book is one which dwells on urbane forms and civilized practices. Hence, there is a long description of Squire Jones' feats of architecture, prolific reference to legal practice, and a lengthy summary of the education, practice, merits and demerits of the local doctor. Conversely, a figure like Billy Kirby, the woodcutter, merits no investigation into the details of his trade. At one point Kirby is visited by Judge Temple, his family and friends, while they are out riding. Kirby is making maple sugar, an interesting and, visually, a very impressive and fascinating scene, but the episode quickly degenerates into farce as Kirby tricks the Frenchman, Monsieur le Quoi, into drinking scalding syrup in repayment for a supposed insult. Kirby's occupation earns no further exposition: Cooper is more interested in the tension arising between these last two named than in the details of the settler's trade.

The book is sub-titled The Sources of the Susquehanna and the diversity in the tributary streams is meant to represent the variety of types and nationalities to be found in the single location of the book. Certainly they are various and each is made to speak in a quaint, deliberate form of speech

which represents Cooper's approximation of the phonetics of Cornish, French, German and Dutch pronunciation. It seems to have been Cooper's intention to illustrate the pragmatic democracy which made a unified structure out of the widely differing types of people found in Templeton. As Turner puts it: "Our early history is the study of European germs developing in an American environment."¹ But it soon becomes clear that it is not Cooper's intention to demonstrate a process of straight-forward homogenization: consistent with his beliefs about the developing social stratification, he is particularly attracted to the differences between the protagonists as well as the ways in which they become a community.

Perhaps because of the indigenously aristocratic qualities of the romance as he knew it, Cooper's subject matter in The Pioneers was pre-determined. However, there do seem to be two distinct structures to the book, one containing the overt sequence of events concerning the reinstatement of Oliver Effingham to a position analogous to that of Judge Temple, and another curious, tortuous structure built around Natty Bumppo, his companion Mohegan John and the wilderness itself.

The curious unevenness of the book is reflected in the fact that there are three central characters in the

¹ F. J. Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York, 1920), p.3.

novel, each one a 'hero' in a different way. The formal hero is Oliver Effingham who is restored to his proper station in life and wins the heroine; Judge Temple is the central character around whom all the events of the novel turn; Natty Bumppo, though not consistently presented in a sympathetic manner, is the one who excites most immediate admiration for his masculine prowess and the air of mystery which surrounds him.

But it is Judge Temple whose excellence is most frequently stressed. It is he who knows the agony of difficult decisions; he who knows sufficient about life itself to conceive a plan and to encourage others to live by it. The responsibility for the observance of the law in the settlement is certainly his, but his responsibilities extend further. Not only is he the law-giver, he is also the patron and protector of his people. In one conversation with his daughter, he reminisces upon the former hardships of the settlement and the burden which fell upon him. He tells her:

"I had hundreds, at that dreadful time, daily looking up to me for bread. The sufferings of their families, and the gloomy prospect before them, had paralyzed the enterprise and efforts of my settlers. Hunger drove them to the woods for food, but despair sent them, at night, enfeebled and wan, to a sleepless pillow. It was not a moment for inaction. I purchased

cargoes of wheat from the granaries of Pennsylvania; they were landed at Albany, and brought up the Mohawk in boats; from thence it was transported on pack-horses into the wilderness, and distributed among my people."¹ (p.222)

Throughout there is the theme that Judge Temple is the guardian of these people and it becomes plain that the Judge discharged his duty with great paternal feeling and at great expense. Having brought the settlement into prosperity, it is his further duty to guarantee its welfare in every way possible. He has the vision to plan for the future; he is disgusted by the irresponsible deprivations made upon the wilderness with no regard for anything but immediate needs. He denounces the use of seine nets in the lake to catch thousands more fish than will ever be eaten. He abhors the use of a cannon to decimate the flocks of migratory pigeons, and even offers a bounty on the heads of the wounded birds so that their misery will quickly be ended.

His wisdom is not received with acclaim on all sides. Richard Jones does not see that the advantages of nature need to be used sparingly and

¹ This coincides almost exactly with what William Cooper did for the pioneer community at Cooperstown. See Butterfield, "Cooper's Inheritance", p.320.

intelligently in order to derive maximum benefit from them.

When reprimanded for his extravagance, he replies:

"But this is always the way with you, Marmaduke; first it's the trees, then it's the deer, after that it's the maple sugar, and so on to the end of the chapter. One day you talk of canals through a country where there's a river or a lake every half-mile, just because the water won't run the way you wish it to go; and the next, you say something about mines of coal, though any man ... can see more wood than would keep the city of London in fuel for fifty years;" (pp.248-9)

But as Cooper knew from experience, it was no easy thing to retain the respect and affection of one's neighbours and inferiors when one wished to pursue an independent policy. However, carrying Cooper's wholehearted approval, the Judge remains as the moral focus, and the cornerstone of the structure, of the novel. Standing as he does for the best aspects of civilization, the foundations of his excellence are broad-based, though they are therefore liable to be undermined. Despite being depicted, abstractly, as a potent moral force, there is one person to whom all Temple represents is distasteful. This person is Natty Bumppo, called Leather-Stocking in this book, who is the eventual hero of the series, and the actual representative of the best of Cooper's art.

In The Pioneers, however, he is devoid of his heroic

status; he is an anachronism driven into the settlement by some mysterious circumstances. And mysterious they are. Cooper required some exceptional state-of-affairs to keep Bumpo in proximity to the settlement: this turns out to be that Bumpo is hiding old Major Effingham in his shack. Effingham is the dispossessed former co-owner of the property, now decrepit and mentally deranged. Through loyalty to Effingham therefore, Bumpo is kept close to the settlement, but a strange figure he appears in this environment.

At the beginning of the book, he stands out as an object of the author's disgust: his physical appearance is repellant, he is known as "the Leatherstocking" but beneath his deer-skin he wears stockings of blue, worsted wool. He is a pathetic remnant of a way of life which no longer exists nor has any relevance to that community. His accuracy with a rifle and the mystique surrounding him earn him the ambivalent tolerance of the community at large, but when he speaks it is with bitterness and for some time he remains a morose, unpleasant figure intractable to the kindness and benevolent nature of Judge Temple. He is drawn into the affairs of the settlement only through his association with Oliver Effingham; otherwise he is content to exist, aloof and recluse, with his Indian companion on the other side of the lake. His agency in the main plot of the novel only becomes active one third of the way through the book when

Elizabeth Temple enlists his help in the Christmas Day turkey-shooting match. And it is through the three major shooting incidents in the book that Bumpo becomes attractive. First, when he kills the turkey in the shooting competition; then when he shoots one specific pigeon separated from the millions in their migratory passage over the valley; finally when he shoots the panther to save the life of Judge Temple's daughter. It is because of such feats as these that he achieves his stature in the novel rather than because of the symbolic rôle he plays as victim of society. Throughout, he is the hunter and marksman, the man who shoots the panther rather than the man who goes to prison for slitting the throat of a deer out of season. He is the adventure-story hero displaced from centrality because Cooper's concerns were more socially oriented at this stage.

The fact that Cooper entitled the book The Pioneers instead of The Pioneer seems to reflect the bias of the author in that Judge Temple and Oliver Effingham are the most sympathetic characters, rather than the character most germane to the frontier situation, the Leatherstocking. Cooper's interest in the way civilization impinged upon the wilderness is explicit, as we know from Home as Found, and he declares his preoccupation with the way in which society evolves vertically rather than the way it expands horizontally. These polarized interests constitute the central confusion of the book, the way

in which he attempts to advance the cause of Judge Temple over that of Bumpo. But Bumpo is a character who interests him. In spite of his old age, debilitation and surliness, he has a vigour which makes the Judge's best attributes seem sanctimonious and his worst seem like self-induced suffering.

The confrontation of the two results from the deer killed out of season and Bumpo's refusal to allow his shack to be searched. There is a superstructure of secondary interests here: whether or not Natty has found a silver mine; what is the secret of his shack; and wherein lies his antipathy to Judge Temple. But the main clash is only between two different ways of life. Temple represents the sophisticated social intelligence (such as Cooper himself strove to achieve and display) while Leatherstocking represents the untutored, and recalcitrant man of nature. The result is therefore inevitable and Bumpo must be punished while the Judge must be lenient to maintain the character of one exercising "wholesome restraints".

The courtroom scene was a difficult one for Cooper to portray since the verdict had to be pronounced against Natty to preserve the hypothesis of the novel. But by this time, the prowess and steadfastness of the old hunter have increased his stature. Therefore, Bumpo comes out of court

a character engaging the sympathy of the reader: "Natty seemed to yield to his destiny, for he sunk his head on his chest, and followed the officer from the court-room in silence", (p.360) and Temple becomes the impotent legislator, constricted and manipulated by the system he is meant to interpret.

The Judge is not without sympathy for the old man and feels anguish for the punishment which the hunter must receive. This clarifies one of the interesting parallels of the book in that Judge Temple becomes more of an acceptable character, the more like Natty he becomes. Among his genuinely endearing qualities are his consideration for nature and creation in general, albeit in a very utilitarian way. The Judge is in favour of a cautious exploitation of nature, which likens his position to that of the old hunter to whom nature is sacred. Bumpo shoots one pigeon, spears one fish, but he also kills one deer and is therefore persecuted by laws which are intended to safeguard the attitude of which he is the living embodiment: frugality, respect and utility. Hence the nascent ambivalent feelings towards the Judge on the part of the author, whose sympathy becomes redirected towards the hunter.

Cooper points out clearly the hunter's purity of heart during the night fishing episode on the lake. The

villagers had to work hard to build a fire by which to see the fish and illuminate the scene. When built, their fire was fitful and erratic. As the villagers drag the thousands of fish to the shore they will eventually rot upon, they see the old hunter fishing on the other side of the lake. At first they see only his torch:

Such an object, lighted as it were by magic, under the brow of the mountain, and in that retired and unfrequented place, gave double interest to the beauty and singularity of its appearance. It did not at all resemble the large and unsteady light of their own fire, being much more clear and bright, and retaining its size and shape with perfect uniformity. (p.251)

And soon the old hunter becomes visible intent on catching, more correctly 'spearing', the one fish which will be enough for his needs.

Unfortunately, Cooper makes the whole statement too explicit when he has the old man castigate the wanton excess of the villagers, and rescue one of their number who has fallen in the lake. But this is the aspect of the hunter's personality which prevails: the competent, self-reliant, reverent force which abhors the 'wasty ways' of the settlers. At this point there begins a weakening of the primary theme of the novel, that which centres around the Temples and the Effinghams, and strengthening of sympathy

for the Leatherstocking who, in this novel, appears at first as no more than the associate of the formal hero. Given Cooper's explicit interest in the developing social forms within a pioneer community, and the way in which the direction of The Pioneers shifts towards the old hunter, it seems Cooper did not fulfil his original intention in the book. The Pioneers begins as a creative exposition of moral excellence oriented to social practices, and ends as an examination of the frontier hero. In the subsequent Tales, Cooper developed this figure more fully, creating a situation in which the frontier hero is seen as the mythic prototype of the American consciousness.

CHAPTER II

"The men of the 'Western World' turned their backs upon the Atlantic Ocean, and with a grim energy and self-reliance began to build up a society free from the dominance of ancient forms."¹

The first novel in the Leatherstocking series, The Pioneers, was conceived as a record of the life of a newly-settled community living close to the frontier, and an account of how civilized forms came to be imposed upon the rude practices of the settlers through the good offices of the aristocratic, agrarian gentleman, Judge Temple. In view of Cooper's explicit interest in law and the agrarian ideal, Temple can be seen as the benevolent force required to bring about the wholesome development of the "European germs...in an American environment", which was the light in which Frederick Jackson Turner saw the early history of America. But the most vigorous creation in Cooper's frontier situation was Natty Bumppo, whose energy and mystery caused Cooper to pursue the development of this character to the exclusion of his original interest in the social forms of an emergent civilization.

¹ Turner, The Frontier in American History, p.253.

The next novel in the series, The Last of the Mohicans, is set in the Adirondacks and the headwaters of the Hudson river. The time is the summer of 1757 during the French and Indian war. The story is sustained by a series of encounters between the Iroquois Indians and Natty and Chingachook, then at the height of young manhood. The novel makes little pretence to be other than an adventure story during which Natty and his Indian friend escort the two daughters of Munro, the commander of the English forces, in their attempt to reach their father. This is probably the most exciting of the Leatherstocking Tales but in terms of the author's increasing interest in the lateral movement of the frontier it has little to say. It is chiefly noteworthy for the information it supplies about the valour of Natty and Chingachook and the nature of Cooper's feelings towards the Indians. As a novel about the frontier, it is vastly less important than the next novel in the series The Prairie which takes over the time scheme as Cooper had left it at the end of The Pioneers.

At the conclusion of the latter, Natty had been hounded out of the settlements. The reason for his remaining, his devotion to old Effingham, had been removed at the dénouement of the book but he was not allowed by the author just to move on of his own free will. Elizabeth Temple and Oliver Effingham watch his romantic exit, and Cooper tells us:

"This was the last that they ever saw of the Leatherstocking, whose rapid movements preceded the pursuit which Judge Temple both ordered and conducted."¹ But Natty was only a refugee in terms of the letter of a law which to him was odious in any case. The true conclusion to the book therefore is Cooper's last words on Leatherstocking: "He had gone far towards the setting sun, - the foremost in that band of Pioneers, who are opening the way for the march of our nation across the continent." The enthusiasm of this Romantic climax seems to show very clearly how Cooper's energies become diverted from an enquiry into the incipient mores of the settlement to an examination of this archetypal figure.

In expelling Natty from the settlements and sending him across the prairies, Cooper extended the scope of his creative vision immensely to include the most important phase of American history - the frontier, the importance of which is germane to the American consciousness. It has been recapitulated in the scores of novels, films and plays with which present-day society abounds. To a large extent, Cooper was responsible for the prototype of scores of western heroes and villains.² Most characteristically it has been the degenerate aspects of the frontier movement which have found commonest currency in contemporary expression - the cruelty,

¹ J. F. Cooper, The Pioneers (New York, 1964), p.476.

² There is an excellent discussion of this in "The Sons of Leatherstocking" in Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land (New York, 1950), pp.54-137.

ruthlessness, bloodshed and savagery. The impact of the Western movement has not been restricted to America alone: the familiarity of the Eastern European schoolboy with the names of the Western movie hero adequately bears out this fact. Here again, it has been the degenerate aspects which have caught the imagination of the world, but it is not only these aspects which have been absorbed into the American way of thinking. It was the theory of the historian Frederick Jackson Turner that the frontier was responsible for forming the consciousness of the whole continent, and that it continues to explain American development.

As far as Turner was concerned, the frontier closed in 1880, when all the free land had been filled up. He defined the frontier as that place where civilization came into contact with the wilderness.¹ After 1880 there was no more wilderness: civilization of some kind or another had occupied the country completely. Cooper certainly seems to have shared the interest shown by Turner and the many other historians who have written about the frontier. His interest was not historical but creative: he was not interested in the long-term development but in the central situation. Such is the evidence of Leatherstocking Tales at least, as we can see from the way in which the "European germs" of these novels become more and more American.

¹ Turner, The Frontier in American History, p.3.

The Prairie is American in its concerns even though Cooper was unable to divest himself of his Romantic and Gothic leanings. Such concerns one could easily expect from Cooper, for whom the nature of the American consciousness and the differences between Americans and Europeans held so large an interest.¹ Among the changes which have taken place between The Pioneers and The Prairie is a growing awareness on the part of the novelist that European forms must be shed or altered. Such an opinion frequently takes the form of disparagement of the Old World and glorification of the New. Most often this opinion is given expression by old Bumpo himself and along with his opinions we have to accept his occasional testiness and his very obvious bias against Europe which, for him, represents the seat of the corruption and concern for law which he observed in the settlements. This bias affects the light in which he is disposed to view the Old World,

¹ This interest is evinced by Cooper's life, and the titles of his works of nonfiction which include: Notions of the Americans, Gleanings in Europe, The American Democrat, etc.

but the grounds for his dislike are not always those against which his particular distaste is directed. When he speaks to the group of settlers about Europe he takes the line that the Old World is stifling:

A miserable land must that be, where they fetter the mind as well as the body, and where the creatures of God, being born children, are kept so by the wicked inventions of men who would take upon themselves the office of the great Governor of all.¹

Partly because this kind of tirade seems so out of place in the mouth of the senile old trapper, the observation loses much of its cogency. But, in effect, it is not too far removed from the point of view which Cooper himself adopts during an intrusion into the narrative. He makes the point that the American pioneers are almost consciously rebelling against European forms and manners and are in fact instituting a new society of crusaders for righteousness. The rhetoric of the comment does not assist the sense, though the meaning does emerge in spite of the imagery:

...it is a fact...that the direct descendants of many a failing line, which the policy of England has seen fit to sustain by collateral supporters, are now discharging the simple duties of citizens in the bosom of our republic.

This is only a statement of straightforward historical fact, but Cooper goes on to be much more polemical:

¹ J. F. Cooper, The Prairie (New York, 1960), p.393.

The hive has remained stationary, and they who flutter around the venerable straw are wont to claim the empty distinction of antiquity, regardless alike of the frailty of their tenement and of the enjoyments of the numerous and vigourous swarms that are culling the fresher sweets of a virgin world. (p.73)

Thus he explains some of the advantages of American society over European society, in a way which is very similar to that of the old trapper towards the end of the book. The intrusion is no less startling for what it says than for the manner in which it suddenly occurs in the narrative. In the sentence following this passage Cooper ostensibly dismisses the matter to continue with "such matters as have an immediate relation to the subject of the tale". Again this is interesting because Cooper immediately returns to a comparison between European and American culture and then specifically to the clan of Ishmael Bush, for whom some considerable case could be made as being the central protagonists of the novel.

In The Pioneers Cooper had dealt with the themes of waste and spoliation and this motif is reintroduced in The Prairie with the entrance of Ishmael Bush. When the family of this man prepare a camping ground for the evening they fell several trees in order to fortify their position against attack, provide fuel for a fire, and to graze their starving

beasts. The scene is interpreted, just as in The Pioneers, through the eyes of Leatherstocking:

As tree after tree came whistling down, he cast his eyes upward, at the vacancies they left in the Heavens, with a melancholy gaze, and finally turned away, muttering to himself with a bitter smile, like one who disdained giving a more audible utterance to his discontent. (p.20)

This closely parallels Bumpo's condemnation of the profligacy of the settlers in the earlier novel, but at this point it seems that a deliberate case is being assembled against Ishmael and his family. To them the trees mean little, but they are of vast utility; the attitude of the old hunter, now trapper, towards nature has previously allowed its thoughtful exploitation. The above interpretation of the behaviour of the squatters initiates the air of gloom and disaster which attends them always. In this sense they are far from being the settlers of Turner's description who show "a grim energy and self-reliance". With these people the grimness turns to gloominess and prevails over all else.

These people provide the prototype for many other "squatters" in Cooper's book such as the family of Thousandacres in The Chainbearer: they are lawless, greedy, patriarchal and stalwart, but more importantly they recognize actual possession as being the only seal of true ownership. Just as Thousandacres would have done, Ishmael thunders out:

"Can you tell me stranger, where the law or the reason is to be found, which says that one man shall have a section, or a town, or perhaps a county, to his use, and another to have to beg for earth to make his grave in. This is not nature, and I deny that it is law." (p.67)

In The Prairie Cooper does not reply to such impassioned rhetoric by having one like the Chainbearer advance a lucid, simplistic argument. Such he did later in the Anti-Rent trilogy, but in this book Cooper undermines their position in a completely different way: he attributes to them the sinfulness of the society from which America has seceded:

Although the citizen of the United States may claim so just an ancestry, he is far from being exempt from the penalties of his fallen race. (p.73)

In The Pioneers society was seen as good and Cooper's interest lay primarily in working out how it could be improved by sophistication and legislation; in The Prairie there is a tremendous shift of interests: emphasizing the destructiveness of society, the author sees it as merely an extension of the corruption of Europe. The perspective has changed from that of Judge Temple to that of the Leatherstocking. The standard of cautious exploitation of nature, whereby Temple becomes like Leatherstocking and admirable towards the end of The Pioneers, is no longer sufficient: now nature is sacred and it is sacreligious to destroy it. The

settlements, previously potentially good if carefully supervised, now become definitively evil as the utilitarian attitude of Temple is subordinated to the reverential attitude of Leatherstocking. All settlers become identified collectively as evil: they bring hatred, greed and envy with them, having no respect for the change they must undergo to make the basic transition from European standards to American ones. The prop which Cooper thought could save them, paternal care together with intelligent legislation, is especially insufficient in the frontier situation. Their sinfulness is merely a shadow of the sinfulness of the society which will flourish in their wake. For this reason these people are named as "the offspring and not the parent of a system". At some length Cooper goes on to enforce the connection between the settlers and the society of which they are harbingers:

The gradations of society, from that state which is called refined to that which approaches as near barbarity as connexion with an intelligent people will readily allow, are to be traced from the bosom of the states, where wealth, luxury and the arts are beginning to seat themselves, to those distant, and ever-receding borders which mark the skirts, and announce the approach, of the nation, as moving mists precede the signs of day. (p.73)

Given this light in which the settlers are viewed, it is difficult to reconcile the point made against them with the

"fresher sweets of a virgin land" of which Cooper has just spoken. Mutually exclusive as these two observations appear, it seems possible that a stark opposition of just these two points of view illustrates a concept which is central to Cooper's theory of America and society. For him America was a place where European forms could be shed, as Lawrence puts it, the old skin can be sloughed off¹ but the disposition of those people attempting the almost sacred task of settling America must be reverent; they must be pilgrims as much as settlers. From the elevation of this point of view most things appear gloomy and dark, pre-destined to failure.

Such is certainly the case with Ishmael Bush and his family, the attitude of whom is certainly not one of reverence. These people mark the outer edge of the frontier and their quest is only one which they hope will bring them profit. They are tainted with the original sin of the society they announce and they have not the sincere moral purpose to expiate their sin, only to promulgate it. The very first time they appear in the story they are introduced as, "a band of emigrants seeking for the Elderado [*sic*] of their desires". (p.11) The very name Ishmael connotes one who is an outcast, and furthermore, one who stands in the displeasure of God. And this aura permeates all the rest of his family, who seem to be from

¹ D. H. Lawrence, "Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels", pp.319-320.

an old Dispensation. Their names are all those of characters from the Old Testament: they are called Ishmael, Esther, Abiram, Asa and Abner. When Ishmael first appears, Cooper describes his person in detail:

There was, however, a singular and wild display of prodigal and ill-judged ornaments, blended with his motley attire. In place of the usual deer-skin belt, he wore around his body a tarnished silken sash of the most gaudy colours; the buck-horn shaft of his knife was profusely decorated with plates of silver; the martin's fur of his cap was of a fineness and shadowing that a queen might covet; the buttons of his rude and soiled blanket-coat were of the glittering coinage of Mexico; the stock of his rifle was of beautiful mahogany, riveted and banded with the same precious metal, and the trinkets of no less than three worthless watches dangled from different parts of his body. (p.12)

This is indeed an unlikely person to encounter on the American prairies. The most striking contrast would be between this hybrid and the aesthetic purity of form of the Pawnee chief Hard-Heart. A more detailed comparison will be made later. At this stage the most interesting fact arising from the amazing description is that it seems to come right out of Cooper's Gothic imagination, and seems to be the incarnation of a Caliban-like pagan spirit.

Consistent with their position among the damned, the lives of the Bush family are characterized by misery,

hardship and disaster.

They can do nothing but pursue their worthless, wasted lives in the best manner they are able. Apart from dwelling in an atmosphere of lugubrious uncertainty, their physical beings are unpleasant; they lack any spark of physical, emotional or intellectual vitality. When Ishmael climbs to the top of a small rise to attempt to find a sheltered spot for the evening, he is thwarted even in this small matter:

It would seem that his search was fruitless; for after a few moments of indolent and listless examination he suffered his huge frame, to descend the gentle declivity, in the same sluggish manner than an over-fatted beast would have yielded to the downward pressure. (p.15)

And this is the norm of his personality above which he cannot hope to rise. If Ishmael and his clan do represent, in one sense, a geographical and moral projection of the evil of the settlements, they have one feature which partially mitigates the otherwise hopelessly black case against them. Just as Judge Temple in The Pioneers achieved his most sympathetic status the more like the Leatherstocking he showed himself to be, so the settlers of The Prairie can achieve some merit. Like the Bush family, Natty personifies a spirit which is antipathetic to the settlements, to the destruction they wreak, to the evil they represent, and to the social laws which they attempt to impose upon a natural

order which is outside their area of jurisdiction. In this respect he has an anarchic quality similar in appearance to that of the Bush family though founded upon a completely different basis. However, the apparent similarity seems sufficient reason to allow Ishmael his one lyrical outburst of the novel. This amounts to quite a concession on the part of Cooper, to whom the rights of property, the subject of Ishmael's speech, were sacrosanct. The argument itself is not allowed to sound convincing but it is the one moment at which Ishmael is allowed to escape from the dullness by which he is otherwise consistently circumscribed. He speaks of the rights of property and the ways in which boundaries are made:

"Why do they [the surveyors] not cover their shining sheep-skins with big words, giving to the landholder, or perhaps he should be called, air-holder, so many rods of heaven, with the use of such a star for a boundary mark, and such a cloud to turn a mill." (p.88)

This is the apex of the merit of Ishmael who most usually is referred to in such terms as his dull smile, "like a gleam of sunshine flitting across a naked ragged ruin" (p.90). Cooper mentions his "repulsive spouse" (passim) and voice which is a stentorian blast in the ears of his family. His rôle among his family is that of the complete patriarchal authoritarian and he suffers no contradiction

of his instructions. The very severity of his discipline elicits one grudging half-compliment from Cooper in the observation that: "There is something elevating in the possession of authority, however it may be abused" (p.391). Certainly this is an idea which continued to attract Cooper even after he had put aside his discussion of the kind of patriarchal excellence socially applied which had attracted him to the character of Judge Temple in The Pioneers.¹

Although Cooper may have found something distantly commendable about the stature of Ishmael within his family, he was repulsed by the symbolic blackness of the figure. Being irrevocably tainted with the original sin of his heritage, Ishmael also carries with him the guilt of his actual sin in kidnapping Inez, the Mexican heiress, who is conjured into the story. In addition to Inez, the family is otherwise characterized by sinfulness. In a situation where they are threatened by danger and death on all sides from the marauding Sioux and Pawnee tribes, the death of one of their number is not at the hands of the Indians but of one of their own family. The description of the resultant lynching is rich in over-explicit symbolism but

¹ I therefore cannot agree with Donald A. Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper (New York, 1962), who says "Judge Temple is, therefore, the first of Cooper's long series of Christain gentlemen on whom he placed his faith for the establishment and maintenance of the good life." (p.37)

has a starkness we have come to expect in any events in which the family are concerned:

The sun was near dripping into the plains beyond, and its last rags lighted the naked branches of the willow. He [Ishmael] saw the ragged outline of the whole drawn against the glowing heavens, and he even traced the still upright form of the being he had left to his misery. (p.413)

Having experienced so much misfortune and demonstrated the extent of their evil, they are then consigned back to the settlements to fritter away their meaningless lives:

On the following morning the teams and herds of the squatter were seen pushing their course towards the settlements. As they approached the confines of society the train was blended among a thousand others. (p.416)

Since he has demonstrated fully how the tarnish of their sinfulness excluded them from the frontier, Cooper has no more use for the Bush family and their fate is sealed as they are relegated to anonymity, which indirectly implies a strongly pejorative comment upon the settlements themselves.

Though they are in themselves a very strong force in the book and an autonomous creation, Ishmael and his family also serve as a means of illuminating the virtues of various other characters. In particular, these other characters are the Leatherstocking and the Pawnee chief Hard-Heart, though even the blustering Paul Hover and

epicene Ellen Wade, as well as Middleton and Inez, the other formal hero and heroine, profit from the comparison. But by this stage the ascendancy of the Leatherstocking is virtually complete even though he cannot be accommodated within a formal structure whereby Cooper conceives of a work of fiction as necessarily a love story.¹ The surrogate heroes Hover and Middleton are redundant to the central considerations, and the main protagonist is the old trapper, even in the devilitated condition in which he appears.

A great part of the symbolic function of the afflicted Bush family was to demonstrate the corruption and decadence of the old order, the Old World. Natty, symbol of man in harmony with the new, even objects to the terminology "Old World". Though, as I have said, the effectiveness of his comments is diminished by the necessary naiveté of his role, his words are no less vehement:

"Were they to say a worn out, and an abused, and a sacrilegious world, they might not be so far from the truth" (p.270)

and the way in which he conducts himself is in accordance with his polemic. His status as a symbol of entire commitment to the new world is ambivalent considering the aspect he presents in the novel. Physically he is old (eighty-six) and decrepit though Cooper cannot refrain from occasionally

¹ Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land, p.71.

crediting him with the spriteliness of a younger person. He has been driven out from the settlements and though this was ten years ago the recollection is still strongly in his mind. His attitude toward those intruding upon the solitude of his last retreat is tolerant and his manner acquiescent though his speech is always close in tone to the way in which he himself is greeted by the Sioux chief masquerading as a Pawnee:

"Have the palefaces eaten their own buffaloes,
and taken their skins from all their own beavers
...that they come to count how many are left
among the Pawnees?" (p.47)

Just as he had been testy, prolix, and ill-humoured in The Pioneers, so he appears on many occasions in The Prairie. His propensity to deliver a sermon in reply to a direct question infuriates the reader and other protagonists alike though this is only a feature of his composed philosophical personality which allows him to face danger or good fortune with the same equanimity. In general terms he is much more mellow and objective: in spite of the fact that he can still denounce the waste of the settlements¹ he is capable of objective comment in areas where previously he would have shown his instant and energetic contempt. About the law he says musingly:

¹ Cooper, The Prairie, p.84.

"The law - 'tis bad to have it, but, I sometimes think, it is worse, where it is never to be found. Yes - yes, the law is needed when such as have not the gifts of strength and wisdom are to be taken care of." (p.29)

though he is still convinced that one of his own "strength and wisdom" has no need for such protection even in the last days of his life. Even as an old man he has not come to be able to forgive the settlers for the damage they do and the destruction they embody: Out on the prairies they will have nothing to destroy, a fact from which he can derive bitter satisfaction:

"Look around you, men; what will the Yankee Choppers say, when they have cut their path from the eastern to the western waters, and find that a hand, which can lay the 'arth bare at a blow, has been and swept the country, in a very mockery of their wickedness. They will turn on their tracks like a fox that doubles, and then the rank smell of their own footsteps will show them the madness of their waste." (p.84)

The reason why the Leatherstocking can be so emphatic in his denunciation is that he is wise. This is the point which the Indians make over and over again, that he is wise, he has snow on his hair, that he has seen everything there is to be seen, and that therefore his opinions are bound to

be worthwhile.¹ Of this point Natty himself is aware, and Cooper allows him to make the point. One of the devices employed by the author to demonstrate Natty's half-intuitive, half-pragmatic wisdom, is in the creation of the naturalist Dr. Obed Bat. During the course of the novel Bat prattles on, humiliates himself, and demonstrates the uselessness of his pedantic knowledge and search after definitive classification. He often prepares to engage the Leatherstocking in academic argument but the old hunter disregards him. On occasion, the latter is sufficiently exasperated to announce his certitude in his own convictions:

"Here have I been a dweller on the earth for fourscore and six changes of the seasons, and all that time have I looked at the growing and the dying trees, and yet do I not know the reasons why the bud starts under the summer sun, or the leaf falls when it is pinched by the frosts?" (p.205)

From the reader's observation of the old man he is forced to concur.

Of the old man's most appealing characteristics are his warmth towards the Indians and the stately, ritualistic way in which he is able to deal with them. In accordance with the ambivalent feelings Cooper had toward the Indians

¹ This can be seen from his effect upon Hard-Heart, one of Cooper's most intentionally admirable Indians. "The youthful warrior listened to the words, which came from the lips of the other with a force and simplicity that established their truth, and bowed his head on his naked bosom, in testimony of the respect with which he met the proffer." (p.357)

there are two types upon the prairie: the treacherous Sioux and the noble, hospitable Pawnees. With both types Natty can deal with facility, since he has the knowledge and the disposition to approach them within the frame of their own culture. He has sufficiently endeared himself to the splendid, noble and courageous Hard-Heart for the young Pawnee chief to ask him to participate in the ritual attending his death, which he thought was imminent.¹ He asked the Leatherstocking to fetch to his grave an unbroken colt "which is sleeker than the buck, and swifter than the elk" and to kill it on his grave, so that he would be able to ride to the land of his fathers. The whole description is beautiful, poignant and moving, chiefly because of the closeness of the relationship between the two. Almost as a reward for the sympathy he has achieved with the Pawnee, Natty is welcomed within the young man's tribe, after the Indian escapes from his Sioux captors in a magnificent show of Indian valour, and there he feebly awaits his death surrounded by kindness, respect and consideration. Just as the moral norm of the novel moves with the Leatherstocking towards the "good" Pawnees, so the squatters become identified and united with the "treacherous" Sioux, though this latter relationship is destined to break up since it is conceived in malice between two unscrupulous parties.

¹Cooper, The Prairie, p.319.

In terms of a confirmation of Cooper's theme of natural excellence, the character of the old hunter in The Prairie demonstrates a remarkable advance from The Pioneers, both in the excellence attained and in the liveliness of the conception and the vigour with which it is drawn. In more general terms, as Warren S. Walker says of Leatherstocking:

He is at once a sharply individualized representative of the type, and beyond that a mythical hero who symbolizes the whole phase of history in which the type flourished.¹

but this does not seem to particularize closely enough the precise symbolic function of the character in this novel. Bumpo is the symbol of the consciousness which can come to terms with nature and with all nature's creations. Though he feels an emotional link with the aboriginal Indians, he is wise and generous enough to preserve an objectivity to assess all men on their individual merit.

As far as Cooper's mythopoeic intentions in The Prairie are concerned, one should certainly judge them as deliberate. Though in the Preface to the collected Putnam edition of the Leatherstocking tales Cooper said he had written them in "a very desultory and inartificial manner", Richard Chase's observation that Cooper "thought of his novels as public acts"² should be borne in mind. It can also be said that the precise

¹ Warren S. Walker, James Fenimore Cooper: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York, 1962), p.32.

² Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition (New York, 1957), p.47.

mythic function of the central character of the series is ambivalent: no precise idea is immediately apparent and some critical interpretations are even more ambivalent than Cooper's original. Such would seem to be the case with Richard Chase who seems reticent to say whether or not Cooper attempts to solve the dilemma he perceives in the settlement of America. It is difficult to agree that the summation of Cooper's achievement is "pastoral nostalgia"¹ as Chase seems to see it. Speaking of "Cooper's own ideal social order" he states the case quite succinctly when he calls it: "that shared and harmonious social order in which the hereditary aristocracy dwells in its country mansions while on the borders of its lands Natty Bumppo stalks the forests".²

But Cooper does not deal in ideal situations such as this and it is important to remember that Judge Temple, apogee of agrarian gentility, expels Bumppo from the borders of his lands. In The Prairie there is a very definite association between Natty and the Pawnee Indians; they are closely connected morally and ethically and then brought into physical juxtaposition to emphasize their mutual congeniality. What seems to be happening symbolically is that Natty becomes united with the benevolent spirit of the continent, represented by the antiquity and excellence of the Indians, while still retaining his white characteristics.

¹ Ibid. p.65.

² Ibid. p.54.

His free and mobile spirit can therefore remain on the prairie and he stays there when all the other white people in the novel go back to the civilization they hoped to precede. Bumpo has achieved harmony with the nature he has cherished for a life-time, while the unrefined squatters cannot hope for this excellence. They have not been able to absolve themselves of the stain of the sin with which all their society is tainted. They are still members of the 'old order' - to inherit the New World they must become unselfish and meek like the old trapper. When Natty dies it seems that his spirit will not change: his life after death will be different from his life before death only in the fact that it will have no end. It is very difficult to become aware of a sense of 'martyrdom' as does Warren S. Walker when he discusses the popular interpretation of the rôle of the frontiersman and goes on to say, "in the figure of Natty Bumpo, Cooper gave America its first distinct messiah image". It becomes harder to agree with Walker when it becomes clear that he predicates this observation on the fact that Bumpo has "discerned intuitively that the civilization in which he cannot participate is of a higher order than the savagism he enjoys".¹ This would seem to mean that throughout those books after The Pioneers Natty is self-deluded, and that in The Prairie Cooper himself is mis-representing the case when he sees the American settlements as an extension of European

¹ Walker, James Fenimore Cooper: An Introduction and Interpretation, p.37.

society, and that Natty is unaware of a point Cooper is at pains to make, that "...the citizen of the United States... is far from being exempt from the penalties of his fallen race".¹

The point would seem to be that the old hunter is the apotheosis of a type, admirable in itself just as Cooper had previously considered Judge Temple on a lesser level, and a shining example of moral - not now social - excellence available to anyone with a resolute purpose of achieving the same standard, and the same harmony with natural creation.

This opinion would seem to coincide with the inference of Richard Chase's question: "How, to raise the question again, are we to transfer Natty Bumppo's moral virtues into the context of a possible culture?"² This exposition he then translates into a purely mechanical problem: "we cannot do it without women, and we note that Natty's world... is purely masculine". But for Cooper the romancer, it presented less of a difficulty: his intelligence was more expository than analytical. Having presented the "seed" transported from Europe to America, he seems to become aware that it is not sufficient merely to have an agglomeration of different nationalities which inter-react to form one unified society. Clearly the "European germs" of which

¹ Cooper, The Prairie, p.73.

² Chase, The American Novel, p.63.

Turner speaks have a meaning for Cooper which requires him to dig inside to the kernel of the situation. The efficacy of Judge Temple is founded upon European forms and manners but Cooper comes to realize in The Prairie that the imposition of these forms upon America produced a whole new situation. To do so required a unique kind of excellence which could perform the function he was so concerned with: that of standing as a spectacular model of goodness, knowledge and practical ability for those to whom becoming American meant much more than geographical relocation. He was less concerned with ideal situations than with ideal people within actual situations.

CHAPTER III

Towards the end of his life Cooper dissipated a great deal of his energy in legal wrangling in attempts to redress various wrongs which he felt had been done him by contemporary reviewers and commentators. Returning to America from Europe he found it difficult to readjust to the American situation, having left behind a society which was probably much more congenial to his aristocratic tendencies and his hierarchical view of the world.

One of the things he did before he died in 1851 was to bring together the five novels about the life of Natty Bumppo and have them published together in one volume as the Leatherstocking Tales. These had been written separately over a period of nineteen years during which time he had written some twenty books together with those featuring the character, Natty Bumppo. By and large, the latter part of his career was by no means so successful as the former and his fall from grace was reflected in the scarring reviews which even his works of nonfiction received.¹ His querulous replies and petty-minded prosecutions went no way towards improving the bad odour in which he stood with the new generation of literarians which had grown up almost without his notice. Cooper himself was extremely disappointed

¹ e.g. His History of the Navy of the U.S.A. was so badly received he began libel suits against the reviewers, which dragged on for years. See James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper (London, 1950) pp.136-150.

at the lack of success of the last two of the Leatherstocking series. Certainly their reception could not compare with that of any of the three previously published since, as William Charvat points out, The Last of the Mohicans had been the most popular American book in the world, and the one from which many Europeans gained their only knowledge of America.¹

Indeed the success of this book had been astonishing and when Cooper came to write the Preface to the collected tales, he wrote seemingly under the shadow of the recollection of his success of over twenty years ago, compared to his present indifferent reception. He speaks of the books having been written in "a very desultory and inartificial manner"² inferring the lack of any precise plan informing the whole series at the outset. He was also responsible for having the stories published, not in the order in which they were written [and in the order it is essential to read them³] but following the internal chronology of the life of their central character. This is very disturbing in view of the fact that the order of the books very significantly alters the meaning of the myth Cooper created. If The Prairie is the last of the series, then the whole amounts to something

¹ W. Charvat, Introduction to Riverside Ed. p.v.

² Preface to 1850 Putnam edition of The Leatherstocking Tales, reprinted in The Last of the Mohicans (Boston, 1958) pp.11-14.

³ This point is made by all of his critics, notably Lawrence and W. S. Walker.

completely different from what it would be if we accept The Deerslayer as Cooper's final statement of the myth. In the Preface Cooper seems to say that he is being merely mechanical in placing the stories in this order, to give the series an overt coherence.

The tone of the Preface is self-deprecatory, perhaps for the reasons I have mentioned, and Cooper seems to have difficulty in re-establishing his interest in something which for him represented the product of a period long behind him. He does allow himself one half-hearted compliment: "If anything from the pen of the writer of these romances is at all to outlive himself, it is, unquestionably the series of 'The Leatherstocking Tales'."¹ and in so saying he has been proven completely correct. He might have gone on to say that within the Tales themselves the creation which would endure would be the figure of the hunter-scout-trapper, Leatherstocking himself. Cooper has several things to say about his intentions in the portrayal of this character, though all of his observations seem to share the muted tone of the rest of the Preface, which has a matter-of-fact quality quite different from the beau idéal he sought to express in his Romances. In spite of this his comments about his central figure are illuminating. As a general comment on Bumppo's career as a whole, Cooper says, "In a moral point of view it was the intention to illustrate the effect of seed

¹ Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, p.11.

scattered by the wayside" (12) but soon he makes a much more specific comment on the nature of the man himself. Natty is, "in a word, a being who finds the impress of the Deity in all the works of nature, without any of the blots produced by the expedients, and passion, and mistakes of man". (13) Clearly Cooper has left the social context in which he began writing the series. Part of his mythic plan was to offer a convincing picture of human excellence in the state most conducive to the attainment of that excellence. On his own admission the author was trying to present the portrait of the most worthwhile virtues he knew, "without offering to the spectator 'a monster of goodness'" (p.13).

Significant also is the microcosm of the world which Leatherstocking inhabits. Being removed from society, from the occasions of sin of the settlements, he pursues an almost solitary existence in the forest and on the prairie. But his existence is not completely solitary, for his lack of affection for social man does not make him thoroughly misanthropic: in each of the five tales, as with the hero in several others of Cooper's novels, he has one friend with whom he shares the entirety of his predicament. In each it is Chingachgook, the Mohican chieftain, except in The Prairie when, the Mohican being dead, his symbolic role is taken over by the young Pawnee chief, Hard-Heart.

The fact that both these Indians are chiefs and are of noble lineage is of considerable importance considering Cooper's bias in favour of long-established aristocracy. It is also important when we realize that it was part of Cooper's design to illustrate the apogée of red nature as well as white; especially when we learn from Cooper that his hero had a great deal to learn from his Indian friends to supplement the Christian morality he had gained since birth:

He is too proud of his origin to sink into the condition of the wild Indian and too much a man of the woods not to imbibe as much as was at all desirable, from his friends and companions. (p.12)

Natty was, in short, "placed in the best associations of that which is deemed savage" (p.12) and for Cooper these "best associations" were of considerable value. In reply to those of his critics who had objected to the high status of the Indians of his tales, in the Preface Cooper explicitly endorses the sincerety and reliability of the Moravian historian Heckewelder from whom most of his material was obtained. This man, a Moravian missionary, proved to be much more of a folk-lorist than a historian, but this fact is immaterial to Cooper whose conception of the red man had much more than an historical role to play in his novels.

As R. W. B. Lewis says with reference to Cooper, "American fiction is the story begotten by the noble but

illusory myth of the American as Adam."¹ Whether Natty Bumppo is Adam, as Lewis claims, or Christ as Roy Harvey Pearce and Warren S. Walker maintain, it seems that there was a benign force operant in the wilderness, to guarantee the wholesome development of the seed which Cooper planted by the way-side, a force which shared in the nature of the central character, as the two grew and developed inter-dependently.

On one level, such seems to be the function of the "good" Indians in the Leatherstocking Tales, especially in the light of the way in which Natty and the Pawnees grow together and are identified together as representatives of the new order in The Prairie where the base and sinful squatters are sent back into the settlements as unworthy. On another level, Indians were generically an ideal constituent for the Romances which Cooper was writing.

As a writer of strong Gothic affinities, Cooper had ready-made "supernatural" ingredients available to him. This is especially so because the novel-reading public had very little knowledge of the American aboriginals. Their views were formed by the European philosophic conception of the "noble savage", and the eulogistic accounts of people like Crèvecoeur; antithetically, there were the reports which filtered back to the Eastern sea-board from

¹ Lewis, The American Adam, p.89.

the frontier of the barbarity, blood-lust and satanism of the Indians. To some extent Cooper begged the question by incorporating both extremes into his portrayal of the American Indian: he had "good" Indians and he had "bad" Indians.¹ As a writer implying some familiarity with these people his interpretation was widely accepted as authoritative, which is extremely ironical in view of the fact that Cooper obtained the vast majority of his information at second hand: except for some brief encounters with small groups of Onandagas later in his life, he had never seen an Indian in his natural environment.

As a boy in Cooperstown he had probably seen old and broken-down renegades lured into the settlements by the attraction of the white man's whisky. This kind of sight was probably that which produced the character of Mohegan John in The Pioneers, the miserable, Christianized, drunken savage; and Cooper's imaginative interpretation of Heckewelder's Account of the History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighbouring States² supplied the Romantic background for the old chief, linking his history with that of the old

¹ Cooper's division of the Indians into 'good' and 'bad' may be briefly summed up thus: on a romance level they provide benign and malign instances of the 'marvelous'; on the symbolic level they represent examples of consummate virtue and consummate evil to be imitated according to the disposition of the observer; in terms of Cooper's personal perception, they are manifestations of his tendency to classify human beings definitively as 'good' or evil', an attitude interpreted by Grossman (p.207) and Fiedler (p.178) as 'Calvinistic'.

² Published in Philadelphia in 1819 and widely read.

hunter and suggesting former glory for them both. When Cooper depicted the Indians in the forest however, he could capitalize upon the aura of mystery and evil associated with the Indian. The "Mingoes" as Cooper and his characters refer to the Iroquois tribes, could take the place of Radcliffian fiendish barons, or the spectral figures who flitted in and out of the pages of Horace Walpole. Both the good and bad Indians in Cooper's stories are visionary in conception and Cooper makes no real attempt at accuracy. Mark Twain compares them to "cigar-store Indians"¹ but this criticism would have meant little to Cooper. His intentions were never those of an historian or ethnologist: he was concerned only with what usefulness they were to him in his books after they had been established as historical fact. He readily acknowledged his debt to Heckewelder in the Preface.

As a missionary, this man went to live among the Mohican tribes of New York State not, laudibly enough, with the sole purpose of bringing them to Christianity with no regard for their own culture, but to live the life of a Mohican. In return he hoped to show the Indians what they could adopt from the culture of the white man without losing their tribal or national identity. In order to be doubly sure about the suggestions he made, he attempted

¹ "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses", in K. S. Lynn, ed., The Comic Tradition in America (New York, 1958), p.333.

to assume the perspective of the Indians completely; he tried to see life as they did. The Mohican Indians were a branch of the Delaware nation who had seceded from the five other principal tribes of the area who were unified in one body. Commonly, the Delawares were held to be inferior to the Iroquois. In the Preface to the first edition of The Last of the Mohicans, Cooper gives the story, acknowledging his reliance upon a primary source:

There is a well-authenticated and disgraceful history of the means by which the Dutch on one side, and the Mengwe on the other, succeeded in persuading the Lenape to lay aside their arms, trusting their defence entirely to the latter, and becoming, in short, in the figurative language of the natives, "women".Like the lustre of the dying lamp, their glory shone the brightest as they were about to become extinct. (p.5)

The closeness between Cooper's legend and Heckewelder's History is remarkable. According to the latter, the Iroquois [Mengwel] plotted the downfall of the Lenape [Delawares] from motives of jealousy, and frustration at not being able to conquer them in battle:

This plan was very deeply laid, and was calculated to deprive the Lenape and their allies, not only of their own power but of their military fame, which has exalted them above all the other Indian nations. They were to be persuaded to abstain from the use of arms, and to assume the station

of mediators and umpires among their warlike neighbours. In the language of the Indians they were to be made "women"...In a luckless hour they gave their consent."¹

Mr. Wallace, the historian who quotes this extract from Heckewelder's History, goes on to make the point that Heckewelder accepted this account of their defeat and inferiority from the Mohicans without questioning its authenticity. In fact, as he shows by some considerable scholarship, the whole account is false and was a folk-lore rationalization on the part of the Mohicans themselves, for the lowly position they occupied.

There can be little doubt that Cooper seized upon Heckewelder's account and instantly recognized the potential of the story to enrich his Tales: hardly a reference is made to the Delawares without some recollection of their former glory, as in The Pioneers when the history of the tribe of the broken-down and decrepit John is recalled:

This people had been induced to suffer themselves to be called women, by their old enemies, the Mingoos, or Iroquois, after the latter, having in vain tried the effects of hostility, had recourse to artifice, in order to prevail over their rivals. (p.75)

and Cooper is never content to attempt to make the point dramatically within the narrative, he must always elaborate

¹ Quoted by P. A. W. Wallace in "Cooper's Indians", in M. Cunningham, ed., James Fenimore Cooper: A Re-Appraisal (Cooperstown, 1954), p.427.

and give a brief history of the nation. The two aspects which seem to interest him most particularly are the facts that they were reduced to passivity through treachery, and that they voluntarily assumed the role of women. These are the two elements which recur most consistently throughout the series. As the result of these incidents in their "history" the tribe is threatened with extinction and this does lend a certain poignancy to the death of Uncas in The Last of the Mohicans, though most often the fact that the race is dying out is superfluous. What attracted Cooper to the Delawares more than anything else was, as he says in the Preface: "Like the lustre of the dying lamp, their glory shone brightest as they were about to become extinct." And their glory is shown by Cooper to be considerable, not only as Mohicans, but as the best representatives of the aboriginal type.

In his article on Cooper's Indians, Mr. Wallace says, "There is in Cooper no forward glimpse of the resuscitation of the Indian race which the twentieth century has seen",¹ but this would seem to be very far from Cooper's exposition of the situation. Admittedly, Mr. Wallace was writing a purely historical article and the "resuscitation" of which he speaks refers partly to such things as the twentieth century's enfranchisement of the Indian. But if we recollect

¹ Ibid. p.430.

that the first Indian presented in Cooper's novels is the old, drunken Mohegan John in The Pioneers, and the last is Chingachgook in The Deerslayer, then Cooper's awakening to the mythic potential of the Indian can be traced. The former book is the one closest to a realistic assessment of the white man's attempts to civilize and Christianize the Indian, and the latter offers a dynamic exposition of the natural virtue of the savage, which Cooper converts into myth.

It would be very difficult, indeed, to over-estimate the importance of the fact that Cooper's Indians exist on two levels: as purely supernatural elements appropriate to Gothic Romance; and as purely mythic creations with status and relevance only as projections of the author's mythopoeic imagination. Warren S. Walker speaks of the Pawnees and Sioux in The Prairie as if with no realization of this fact: "However accurately Cooper may have tried to picture these red horsemen of the Plains, one nonetheless senses...transmogrified Delawares and Iroquois."¹ In substance he is completely right, the two sets of tribes correspond exactly; but in the interpretation he makes of this fact he seems to be misdirected. Not only did Cooper make very little attempt at realistic illustration of the "red horsemen of the Plains", but his forest Indians are

¹ Walker, James Fenimore Cooper, p.60.

equally inaccurately presented. Nor was it only the horsemen themselves which ring untrue; the very prairie on which Cooper placed them was conceived more in imagination than in fact. This is evinced by the fact that old Natty would have made an extremely scant living as a trapper of beaver on the prairie. Also, there is the criss-cross of rivers flowing randomly over the plains, and the huge Gothic "rock" which raises itself out of the grasslands only that it might provide a fortress for the beleaguered Ishmael Bush and his family and keep them on the scene.

With his Indians, just as with his locale, Cooper took many liberties. Walker does not seem to recognize any inconsistencies among Cooper's forest Indians whereas, in fact, as Arthur C. Parker puts it:

...he placed a Connecticut Uncas¹ in King George's New York 'court-yard', mixed the Indians of the Thames with those of the Hudson and Lake George, and put the Delawares of New Jersey on Lake Champlain. He had Mohawks aiding the French instead of standing at the side of England's William Johnson and his successors, and he made the Hurons a still effective fighting force, as if they had not been thoroughly scattered in 1650 by the despised Magwas. Then how he scrambled names!²

Clearly Cooper was not aiming at any kind of literal accuracy;

¹ Uncas was a name belonging to Connecticut 'Mohegans' and not the 'Mohicans' of the Upper Hudson.

² Arthur C. Parker, "Sources and Range of Cooper's Indian Lore", James Fenimore Cooper: A Re-Appraisal (Cooperstown 1954), p.449.

had he attempted this, many sources would have been readily available to him. Very interestingly, it seems that Cooper's contemporary audience were not bothered by Cooper's lapses from literal truth. As a last indication of how small was Cooper's regard for accuracy, one might point out, as does Mr. Parker, that the Mohicans are not extinct to this day.¹ Cooper never tried to be a prophet of Indian destiny, or a faithful recorder of their lives and customs. He could have obtained genuine acquaintance with Indians personally and with their history easily enough had he sought this, but he was interested in something much different.

As I have said, all his red men fall generically into two categories, good and bad. As far as the bad Indians are concerned, no condemnation is too severe. Throughout the Tales the evil Iroquois [and then the Sioux] are qualified by such epithets as "lying", "deceitful" and "treacherous". Indeed the phrase "treacherous Mingo" almost becomes an official appellation. All Mingoes are treacherous and, naturally enough, their chief is distinguished by being more treacherous than all the rest. It is in The Last of the Mohicans, that Cooper makes his most positive statement about the goodness and the evil of the redskins, and in this book it is Magua who is most evil, and his portrayal seems

¹ Ibid. p.450.

based upon the broad outlines of Milton's conception of Satan: he is physically magnificent, eloquent and heroic. While other members of this tribe are referred to as "the less refined monsters of the band" (p.117) he is shown "gliding among his countrymen, and speaking with his fatal and artful eloquence" (p.188) urging them on to further evil and treachery, stimulating them with his "fatal and appalling whoop".(p.189) Towards the climax of the book, Magua is pursued by Leatherstocking and his allies into a cave and the diabolism of the renegade chief and his tribe becomes even more explicit:

The place, seen by its dim and uncertain light, appeared like the shades of the infernal regions, across which the unhappy ghosts and savage demons were flitting in multitudes. (p.356)

Just like Magua, the Sioux chief Mahtoree in The Prairie is frequently referred to in diabolic terms. When he steals into the camp of Ishmael Bush, Cooper likens him to "the master of evil" (P.57). Just as with the "good" Indians, their merit is assessed in terms of their extreme characteristics.

All of Cooper's Indians whether good or bad are a concatenation of fact, fiction and folklore. But as an artistic creation they are linked by a specific code of behaviour by which they are circumscribed and idealized. Most noticeably they are silent, never prone to garrulous outbursts. Their silence is indicative of the impassive aspect

they present to the world, and they are prompted to speak only to express powerful emotions, usually of love or of hate. Otherwise their laconic temperament is summed up in the simple monosyllable, "Hugh!". When an Indian becomes a chief he develops amazing powers of declamatory rhetoric to incite his tribe to absolute frenzy. When an Indian is allowed by Cooper to speak at length, his language is simple, lyrical, figurative and beautiful. The imagery is drawn from the wilderness that surrounds them and is expressed with succinct purity. This is a trait acquired by Natty himself but it sounds much more charming in the mouths of the redskins who possess a physical beauty consistent with the beauty of their language. In The Deerslayer Chingachgook's wife Wah-ta-Wah sends a message with Natty to deliver to her husband explaining her faithfulness. The language is simple and delicate, and the sentiments refined:

"Among my people, the rose dies on the stem where it budded; the tears of the child fall on the grave of its parents; the corn grows where the seed has been planted...Even the robin and the martin come back, year after year, to their old nests; shall a woman be less true-hearted than a bird? Set the pine in the clay and it will turn yellow; the willow will not flourish on the hills; the tamarack is healthiest in the swamp; the tribes of the sea love best to hear the words that blow over the salt water ...Wah-ta-Wah has but one heart and it can love but one husband.¹

¹ J. F. Cooper, The Deerslayer(Toronto, 1963), p.221

It certainly seems to have been the rich native culture, the mythic potential of their heritage, the natural beauty of form and speech, and the power and nobility of their sentiments which endeared the Indians to Cooper. It is interesting that his portrait of Wah-ta-Wah comes closer to a convincing presentation of a woman than any other of his wilting, blushing heroines.

Just as he was attracted to the power of evil in Magua, so he was attracted to the magnificence of the 'good' Indians Chingachgook, Uncas, and later, Hard-Heart. Though, as Walker points out, there is no real tribal differentiation between his Indians at all [other than into "good" and "bad" tribes] and all must be consistent with the code of honour for which Cooper makes them stand. Oddly enough, it is in the person of Uncas that the Indian code of behaviour finds its best expression - in Uncas, the most magnificent warrior, but one who is unable to live up completely to the pattern determined for him by his colour. Apart from his "tragic flaw", his attraction for Cora, the daughter of Munro, he is the incarnation of the best possible practice of Indian virtues. If his ethics allow him to take scalps and revel in bloodshed, they also require him to conduct himself in a way which must be objectively acknowledged as admirable. His behaviour while the captive of the Mingoos, his prodigious physical attributes, his ability to remain impassive in the

face of physical and verbal provocation, his total disregard for pain and suffering, demonstrate the fullness of the code that required the maintaining of one's personal dignity at all costs. The description of Uncas being tortured is much more majestic and convincing than the equivalent one involving Leatherstocking: the latter acts as though he were oblivious to everything; the former like an Indian under torture, resolutely determined to preserve his self-esteem and the admiration of his persecutors. In this situation, Cooper ascribes a faintly God-like quality to Uncas as he ignores Cora's questioning eye:

The Mohican chief maintained his firm and haughty attitude; and his eye, so far from deigning to meet her inquisitive look, dwelt steadily on the distance, as though it penetrated the obstacles which impeded the view, and looked deep into futurity. (p.260)

Such were the characteristics which Cooper admired and which the Leatherstocking learned from his association with these noble people, thereby becoming a considerably more admirable person in the scale of values as Cooper erects them. The theme of the white man learning from the Indian is an important one, since the author is often at pains to point out that the uncompromising honour of the Indian constitutes a formidable, positive moral force. It is this moral force which fosters the pietas of the Leatherstocking

in the wilderness; also it could prove efficacious to the tenor of white nature in general, if the white man could open up his heart to learn from them. When the party of Natty and his associates are received into the Pawnee village, Paul Hover, the bee hunter, a character quite sympathetically regarded by the author, reveals basic inadequacies in white nature and his behaviour is scornfully described as,

...prying with but little reserve into their domestic economy, commenting sometimes jocularly, sometimes gravely, and always freely, on their different expedients, or endeavouring to make the wondering housewives comprehend his quaint explanations of what he conceived to be the better customs of the whites. (p.418)

Rather sententiously Cooper points out the superiority of the behaviour of the Indians:

This inquiring and troublesome spirit found no imitators among the Indians. The delicacy and reserve of Hard-Heart were communicated to his people. (p.260)

The white man lacks the primitive simplicity and intuitive sense of propriety of the 'good' Indian; and even the devotion to a specific ideal of the 'bad'. The white man is of the "old order" [as this is delineated in The Prairie] and the red, in spite of his history, carries along with him a spirit of freshness and purity which is preserved by

his way of life and his strict code of behaviour. In The Last of the Mohicans, Uncas dies because he desires Cora, because he wishes to introduce a representative of the old corrupt system into that tribe which demonstrates the consummate excellence of Indian freshness and purity. This is the sense in which Cooper's fear of miscegenation is strongest, that the Indian should be tempted to be false to his code.

The code of the Indians ranks second in importance only to the natural pietas of Leatherstocking. At different times Cooper makes his statement of this code poignant, terrifying, or even faintly ridiculous. In support of the last observation, there are many examples such as the occasion in The Last of the Mohicans when Natty vilifies the duplicity and treachery of Magua who has not the honour to acknowledge being beaten. Natty says,

"An honest Delaware now, being fairly vanquished, would have lain still, and been knocked on the head, but these bravish Maquas cling to life like so many cats-o'-the-Mountain" (p.124)

but the reason that this seems amusing may perhaps be that the reader too lacks genuine sympathy with the code which Cooper extols so highly. A much more powerful, if horrible, exposition of similar Indian adherence to their beliefs occurs in the description of the old Sioux chief Bohrecheena

in The Prairie, this time an 'evil' Indian, who nevertheless possesses the conviction that to lose his scalp to the enemy is dishonourable, and who has the awful dignity to resort to desperate measures to prevent this happening:

The old man raised his tottering frame to its knees, and first casting a glance upward at the countenance of his countrymen, as if to bid him adieu, he stretched out his neck to the blow he himself invited. A few strokes of the tomahawk, with a circling gash of the knife, sufficed to sever the head from the less valued trunk. The Teton mounted again, just in season to escape a flight of arrows which came from his eager and disappointed pursuers. Flourishing the grim and bloody visage, he darted away from the spot with a shout of triumph. (p.387-388)

In the light of how Cooper manipulates what he knew of the native American peoples into a coherent and personal conception of excellence, the friendship between Natty and Chingachgook takes on an important perspective. Natty is white and proud to say so, the books are full of references to the fact that he is "a man without a cross" and he is therefore associated strongly with the forces which are attempting to inhabit the continent. But he is also alienated from them: he stands apart from Judge Temple because of his non-acceptance of the "wholesome restraints" which the Judge found necessary for the preservation of social order; he stands apart from the settlers of the Ishmael Bush breed by

virtue of his superiority to the sinfulness of the rapacious ex-European which Bush and his family represent; he is associated sympathetically with various white characters throughout the Tales but the closeness of the association seems to depend upon how much these characters can become like Natty. None measure up to his standards of excellence and they are therefore not allowed to remain with him. His alienation is not really caused by antipathy but by uniqueness - a uniqueness which is most closely approximated by the formal excellence of the Indians, most especially the good Indians Chingachgook and Hard-Heart. These people alone can approach sympathetically the

...being who finds the impress of the Deity in all the works of nature, without any of the blots produced by the expedients, and passion, and mistakes of man.

So Cooper himself explains the nature of his hero in the Preface to the collected Tales. These few share the isolation of goodness, especially Chingachgook, for whom the isolation is made a quasi-historical fact as well as a fictional reality. Knowing as we do how literally Cooper was disposed to accept Heckewelder's account of Mohican history, it is plain that Chingachgook was a literal example of the solitude of goodness: his tribe had been wiped out because of their desire to serve mankind,¹ and he is left

¹ P. A. W. Wallace, "Cooper's Indians", p.427.

as a solitary model of his own kind of goodness, a characteristic regarded by Cooper as well worth achieving.

As a general statement on the content of the Leatherstocking Tales Leslie Fiedler says,

Two mythic figures have detached themselves from the texts of Cooper's books and have entered the free domain of our dreams: Natty Bumppo, the hunter and enemy of cities; and Chingachgook, nature's nobleman and Vanishing American. But these two between them postulate a third myth, an archetypal relationship which also haunts the American psyche: two lonely men, one dark-skinned, one white, bend together over a carefully guarded fire on the virgin heart of the American wilderness; they have forsaken all others for the sake of the austere, almost inarticulate, but unquestioned love which binds them to each other and to the world of nature which they have preferred to civilization.¹

As a general statement this comment has a certain amount of truth and indeed, a certain amount of beauty. However, one can easily be seduced into over-emphasizing the fact that Natty Bumppo is the "enemy of the cities". It is true that he dislikes the settlements, but this is because of what they represent, not because of what they comprise. For Cooper, certainly as he adumbrates the situation in The Prairie, the settlements represent the extension of European sinfulness

¹ Fiedler, Love and Death, p.187.

which must be atoned for before the settlers can inherit the continent. The settlers must learn to partake of the admirable qualities of Natty and Chingachgook to be true to their code, to their "gifts", and in this sense Chingachgook is not the "Vanishing American" but is as prototypical as Natty. With reference to the third myth of which Fiedler writes, as he puts it elsewhere, "The passion which joins together the men of races forbidden to mingle in marriage"¹ something should be said regarding the definite feminine characteristics of Cooper's Indians.

In one of the passages which Fiedler pinpoints, the meeting between Mordaunt Littlepage and the old Indian Susquesus, in The Chainbearer, the latter is given a very feminine quality:

Priscilla Bayard herself, however lovely, graceful, winning and feminine, had not created a feeling so strong and animated, as that which was awakened in me in behalf of old Sureflint.²

especially since the woman to whom he is compared is she whom his family are urging him to marry. Fiedler is not alone in noticing the femininity of the Indians. D. H. Lawrence makes the point more concretely: he refers to "The Indians, with their curious female quality, their archaic figures, with high shoulders and deep, archaic waists, like a sort of woman!"³

¹ Fiedler, Love and Death, p.211.

² Cooper, The Chainbearer, p.108.

³ Lawrence, "Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels", p.317.

One point which should be made immediately refers back to Heckewelder, the primary source of Cooper's information about Indian life and ways. In the statement of the Mohican myth according to Heckewelder the fact that the tribe were made to become like 'women' is mentioned and given emphasis. Though Mr. Wallace goes to some great lengths to illustrate that this rôle was really a gesture of approbation and not hostility on the part of the Iroquois,¹ Cooper certainly assumes Heckewelder's inference that the Mohicans had been reduced to the status of women.² From this point of departure it seems that Cooper then goes on to endow all his Indians with a "curious feminine quality". It is important to note that in The Pioneers, the first of the series, Cooper makes reference to the fact when giving the history of the old misfit, alcoholic John Mohegan's tribe.

Since it is clear that Cooper accepted Heckewelder's interpretation of Mohican history for symbolic purposes with reference to the justification of their inferiority, it is not hard to believe that their rôle as women also lent something to his symbolic purpose. Perhaps all that should be said is that the myth contains examples of masculine and feminine excellence, but in a situation which shown to exist timelessly throughout the Tales there seems

¹ Wallace, "Cooper's Indians", pp.440-445.

² Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, p.5.

to be an inference of the bringing together of these two forces and some kind of suspended parturition of the excellence which Cooper was at such pains to demonstrate.

In either case, Cooper demonstrates how the Leatherstocking achieves a profound intimacy with the "good" Indians, from whom he learns and supplements the "gifts" of his own race, colour and religion. The hero is enabled to achieve this intimacy by his own wisdom and charity. The relationship between the Leatherstocking and his Indian friends is, therefore, central to Cooper's exposition of the consciousness which can exist harmoniously with created nature on the frontier, and serve as the forerunner of American civilization.

CHAPTER IV

In his discussion of the Leatherstocking Tales, Richard Chase makes the incontrovertible point that Cooper's main significance lies in his contribution to the myth of America: that his intentions were not to be realistic but to be mythopoeic, to provide a prototype of the emergent American consciousness.¹ Since "myth is very seldom a way of ordering transcendent knowledge or belief" the mythic aspect of fiction is therefore "of the political, social, or more broadly, the cultural sort".² Having established that the use of myth in fiction operates to give significance to life within the culture which the work of fiction discusses, Chase then goes on to show that Cooper was attempting to propose a viable cultural situation, idealized as an aristocratic agrarian society "in which Cornelius Littlepage and Natty Bumppo are the intuitive coadjutors and twin ideals". Since Cooper is unable to sustain creatively this twin idealism, Chase maintains, then the myth necessarily becomes ironic and self-destructive.

Chase's argument that the myth is ironic therefore seems to depend upon the fact that Cooper attempts to maintain the delicate balance between his idealization of an aristocratic agrarian gentleman and that of the man in nature, fundamentally

¹ Chase, The American Novel, pp.52-65.

² Ibid., p.53.

opposed to the agrarian frame of mind. Such a balance would clearly have been very difficult to maintain, and there seems to be little in the Leatherstocking Tales to support anything other than extreme tension between these polarities. Expressed as such, they do represent the extremes of Cooper's interests: the agrarian ideal which he firmly espoused personally, and the fate of the new Democratic seed planted in the wilderness. But to say that the two were mutually destructive and that society was then replaced by virtual anarchy celebrated in an ironic myth does not seem to do full justice to what Cooper attempted to do.

Cornelius Littlepage, landlord-hero of Satanstoe represents the paragon of agrarian excellence as do many others of this type. Within the Leatherstocking Tales we encounter the type in Judge Temple and watch the increasing tension develop between the agrarian and the "man in nature" ideals. Formally The Pioneers concludes with a victory for Judge Temple who has demonstrated the inevitability of law, of "wholesome restraints"¹ being imposed upon the settlers to safeguard the society they are bringing into being. It is a formal victory over the Leatherstocking who has been punished for his breach of the law. Chase's contention that Cooper envisages an ideal society in which these two types

¹ Such is the function of Temple throughout The Pioneers; his perception of the need for "wholesome restraints" is the basis of his characterization.

can co-exist breaks down as the Leatherstocking is driven away, to become the subject of an exposition in which Judge Temple can play no part.

In the preface to the first collected edition of the Leatherstocking Tales Cooper observes that these five books will outlast all the rest of his works both of fiction and non-fiction. Perhaps this was only because of a sentimental attachment to the stories and a recollection of the tremendous success of the first three, especially that of The Last of the Mohicans but equally likely is the fact that Cooper realized that in this series he had got to grips with a problem which he had not touched on elsewhere. Emerging from the tension of opposites which were essentially political and social in The Pioneers, there became apparent the much larger and the much more crucial problem of how white civilization itself, regardless of religions or ideological differences, could be absorbed into a pre-existent order. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the country already had an owner from whose grasp it must be taken by force. In the light of this situation Cooper wrote, not an ironic myth focusing on "the purely solitary and personal virtues of the isolated and the doomed",¹ but a legend celebrating the character who anticipated the whole process of settlement in his confrontation with the wilderness

¹ Chase, The American Novel, p.54.

and its aboriginal inhabitants. This character was able to do so because he possessed the moral fortitude to retain the benefits of his white, Christian origins in a situation which had, as Lawrence observes,¹ a disintegrating effect on the white psyche when unequipped with the moral responsibility to attempt the task. This is why Cooper constantly stresses the Christian pietas of his hero, his willingness to meet the Indians on their own terms, and his reluctance to cling to European forms useless in this new situation.

The Deerslayer is the final statement of the myth, energetic in its exposition of the virtue of its hero, severe in its censure of those who attempt to impose from above the manners and usages of the Old World, and enthusiastic in its praise of the reward which can be attained by those deserving enough, in a literal sense, to inherit. As

R. W. B. Lewis comments:

Cooper was wise to tell no further tales of Hawkeye, to leave him at the close of The Deerslayer, in his spatial world unencumbered by wife and family, and to conclude the entire Leatherstocking series with the hero's birth and young manhood. For according to the vision Cooper shared, the end was paradoxically a fresh beginning, and no transforming experience was envisaged or desired beyond it.²

¹ Lawrence, "Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels", p.318.

² Lewis, The American Adam, p.105.

In many other regards Cooper was wise to conclude the series with the "birth and young manhood" of his hero since it is in The Deerslayer that we find the strongest statement of the other elements of the myth which Cooper had discussed previously. Apart from the expression of Natty's timeless innocence and practical virtue, the theme of the perniciousness of European society through its devotion to worn-out and corrupt forms is re-introduced from The Prairie where it finds its most vehement expression. In The Deerslayer, the symbol of the corruption of Europe and its unsuitability to the American situation is the old wooden trunk of the trapper, Hutter. His earlier career as a pirate is suggested throughout, and the contents of the chest confirm this. The scene in which Natty, Chingachgook and Judith Hutter examine the contents of the chest in an attempt to find something with which they can bribe the savages to release Judith's captive father is one which breathes the suspense and wide-eyed innocence of the hero in anticipation of the mysteries it may contain. This attitude changes to one of admiration for the richness of the finery which the trunk holds, and this rapidly becomes contempt for the prodigality it represents. When Judith puts on the ornate brocade dress they have found, Deerslayer gently reprimands her for the approval which putting on the dress implies:

"You are Thomas Hutter's darter, and that gown was made for the child of some governor, or a lady of high station and it was intended to be worn among fine furniture and in rich company." (p.205)

Chingachgook endorses this rebuke and so Judith immediately withdraws to change the dress, reappearing in "her own simple linen frock" and harmony is restored. Such is the suspicion with which Deerslayer regards all the items in the trunk that he suspects that the ornate ivory chess pieces which they find, are Hutter's gods. The proof of the latent evil of these remnants of the old order lies in the fact that one of the pistols they find explodes when they try to fire it in order to clear the charge which has been carelessly left in the gun. Also, when Judith wears the brocade gown again while posing as a queen attempting to order Natty's release from his Iroquois captors, she is unsuccessful; the Indians easily see through her specious disguise. In a parallel situation, the ivory chessmen are sufficient to obtain the release of old Hutter and his friend who have been captured while on an expedition to scalp women and children for sheer profit, but not to secure Natty's release. The significance seems quite clear: that the treasures of the old world possess efficacy when used in the context of their own order, but that they are useless when applied to the new order that Natty represents.

Counter-balanced against the evil of the old world there is the theme of the attractiveness, majesty and vigour of the new expounded in the magnificent descriptions of the forest and Lake Glimmerglass, and the tenderness and beauty of the love between Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah, his sweetheart. In The Deerslayer Cooper's approval of the valour, majestic bearing and faultless conduct of the "good" Indians is given a new lyricism and poetry especially in their speech, but also in the panegyric descriptions which he often gives of their actions, such as the one in which he describes Chingachgook's sweetheart:

One unpracticed in the expedients and opinions of savage life would not have suspected the readiness of invention, the wariness of action, the high resolution, the noble impulses, the deep self-devotion, and the feminine disregard of self, where the affections were concerned, that lay beneath the demure looks, the mild eyes, and the sunny smiles of this young Indian beauty. (p.179)

Such are the ideal virtues of the "good" Indians as expounded in The Deerslayer. In addition the connection between the French and the Iroquois goes some way towards explaining the evil of the "bad" who are corrupted through their affiliation with the Old World French. Previously the "bad" Indians, especially the Sioux in The Prairie, were congenitally evil and Cooper felt required to give no explanation other than that

to be evil was their "gifts" and that they were therefore less reprehensible. In The Last of the Mohicans, as well as in The Deerslayer, the Iroquois are the tools of the French. Historically, as I have said, this was completely untrue, but for Cooper it was consistent with the old/new dialectic in which he perceived the frontier situation.

The most interesting aspect of The Deerslayer, however, is the character of the main protagonist himself, Natty Bumppo, who in this book is known as the Deerslayer, and then as Hawkeye after he has killed his first Indian on the shores of the lake. Progressing from the situation of observing the "European germs developing in an American environment"¹ in The Pioneers, Cooper, by the time he came to write The Deerslayer eighteen years later, had isolated the fundamental issue: that of white, Christian nature coming to grips with the American continent. Such is the gradual progression of the intervening books in the series and nowhere is the issue stated more forthrightly than in The Deerslayer, which deals with each of the hero's characteristics and symbolic functions. One of Natty Bumppo's functions was to kill; to live he was required to kill deer and small game, but also he had to kill Indians. However, he only had to kill evil Indians because the way in which virtue intuitively recognizes virtue in Cooper's books

¹ Turner, The Frontier in American History, p.3.

obviates the necessity for any confrontation of two positive forces. Being the symbolic prototype of the American, it is not until he has killed an Indian that Natty is symbolically born, and this event takes place early in The Deerslayer. By accident he encounters an Iroquois on the shore of the lake. The young Natty entertains no immediately hostile thoughts towards the savage but is compelled to kill him in what David Brian Davis calls an "idyll of death in the midst of unspoiled nature".¹ The ritual includes not only the death of the savage, but the symbolic rebirth of the hunter into the personality he will be for the rest of his mythic life, or as Lewis puts it, for the rest of "space",² the proper element for Cooper's hero. As the Iroquois dies he asks Natty:

"What we call him?"

"Deerslayer is the name I bear now...."

"That good name for boy - poor name for warrior.

Me get better quick. No fear there" - the savage had strength sufficient, under the strong excitement he felt, to raise a hand and tap the young man on his breast. - "eye sartain - finger lightning - aim death - great warrior soon. No Deerslayer - Hawkeye - Hawk eye. Shake hand." (p.109)

This incident celebrates the birth of the character whom Cooper saw as being the best possible representative of white civilization whose mission it was to bring the whole continent

¹ D. B. Davis, "The Deerslayer, A Democratic Knight of the Wilderness", in Charles Shapiro, ed., Twelve Original Essays (Chicago, 1958), p.12.

² Lewis, The American Adam, p.98.

under their domination, and to erect there a society equipped to enjoy the blessings of their magnificent good fortune.

Lewis speaks of Natty's symbolic baptism being enacted

"in the forest on the edge of a lake, with no parents at hand, no sponsors at the baptism; springing from nowhere, as Tocqueville had said, standing alone in the presence of God and Nature".¹

In spite of the sense of mystery surrounding the young man's origins, Cooper goes to some lengths to establish the fact that he is white and Christian. Though he stands "alone in the presence of God and Nature" in a dimension which is timeless, the precise nature of his origins being blurred, the major factors which produced his personality are given and stressed. At the very time of the confrontation between the Iroquois and the Deerslayer, the latter's unselfish, passive, and congenial attitude evokes from the savage the comment, "My brother missionary", thereby emphasizing at this crucial moment the association between the youth and orthodox Christianity.

In the preface to the New York collected edition of the Tales (1850) Cooper gives in outline the personality of his hero as he had placed him "in the best associations of that which is deemed savage".² In The Deerslayer the "best associations" are nature and the hero's Indian companions. These are extolled as sincerely as is the hero himself.

¹ Ibid., p.105.

² Reprinted in The Last of the Mohicans, p.12.

Here Cooper sees him as,

a fair example of what absence from bad example,
the want of temptation to go wrong, and native
good feeling can render youth. (p.40)

But Cooper seems to be deliberately understating the case, since he omits from the description the positive virtues which he attributes to his hero throughout. The "native good feeling" is not merely a general amicability but something much more positive; the author expounds this with occasional annoying repetitiousness throughout the book.

References to the fact that Natty Bumppo is "a man without a cross" who spent his childhood among Moravian missionaries pervade the Tales, but they become much denser and much more explicit in The Deerslayer, the only book in which the details of his childhood and early education are sketched in. Very often it is Natty himself who provides these details, but a frequent device on the part of the author is to have other characters, often those degenerate types whose vision is clouded by self-delusion and malice, state the case. They thereby provide a comment on the hero which the narrative proves to be calumnious, and at the same time illustrate their own depravity. When Hurry Harry, the woodsman who is noble in appearance but base in mind and morality, observes, "You're a boy, Deerslayer, misled and misconsaited by Delaware arts and missionary ignorance " (p.51)

the comment reveals as much about the speaker as about Deerslayer.

All the characters of the Leatherstocking Tales represent types rather than individual people. At worst, such characterizations are stilted, wooden and uninteresting; at best, their personality is subsumed by an ideal which lends to the character an interest and value in proportion to the energy and attractiveness of the ideal itself. Such is the case with the Deerslayer in his symbolic capacity as the apogee of Christian nature in the American wilderness. He often makes the forthright statement, "I am a Christian born" (284), and just as often succinctly states Cooper's view of the nature of his position as the forerunner of civilization:

"I'm white in blood, heart, nature and gifts,
though a little redskin in feelin's and habits." (p.283)

Because he has kept intact those things which his colour and his religion provided, his "gifts" as he calls them, he is enabled to enter into a unique closeness with created nature. Towards the very beginning of the book Cooper pinpoints the intimacy of the union between the youth and the wilderness:

It was the air of deep repose - the solitudes
that spoke of scenes and forests untouched by
the hands of man - the reign of nature, in a
word, that gave so much pure delight to one of
his habits and turn of mind. (p.38)

So it is that the white man, in spite of the fact that part of his function in America is to destroy, can achieve a perfect unity of spirit with the soul of the continent itself. In the progression from The Pioneers to The Deerslayer we watch the way in which one soul, that of Judge Temple, in spite of its good intentions, is required to be broken down, to have all its energies and sympathies re-ordered so that it might become not only congenial to, but part of, the continent itself. Though Cooper professed to be more interested in the upward social evolution of society, than in the lateral advance of civilization across the continent, the lesson of the Leatherstocking Tales is that he had to carefully examine the precise nature of the foundations of that society before he could follow his interest in the structure which grew up from them. The myth of the Leatherstocking Tales is one which includes Judge Temple, the first exponent of social excellence whom Cooper proposed, as the cornerstone of an established society of which the author then established the foundation. The Leatherstocking precedes Temple in historical time, legitimizes Temple's society through his virtue, and leaves a legacy of wisdom and good example. When the young hunter is presented in The Deerslayer he is young in years but he is old in wisdom, as Lawrence puts it: "His simplicity is the simplicity of age rather than of

youth. He is race-old."¹

As Richard Chase puts it in a footnote to his chapter, "The Significance of Cooper", criticism of this author has been shaped very largely by Lawrence, of whose interpretation most other critics' work is "an elaboration or revision". He regards Lawrence as "a sympathetic but critical foreigner", but is suspicious of the impression of "a sort of messianic instability and prophetic intuitiveness"² which he felt to characterize the work of Lawrence and contemporary critics of Cooper. This may seem to imply some kind of derogation of Lawrence, but essentially it is fair comment. The most important aspect of Lawrence's criticism is the way in which it emphasizes the mythic quality of the series, particularly The Deerslayer:

But it is a myth, not a realistic tale. Read it as a lovely myth. Lake Glimmerglass.³

Unequivocal as the injunction may be, it would be more helpful a comment if Lawrence had been less enthusiastic and more specific about the nature of the myth itself. However, as an opinion to balance Chase's point of view that the myth of the Leatherstocking Tales is essentially ironic, another comment of Lawrence's becomes meaningful: "True myth concerns itself centrally with the onward adventure of the integral soul"⁴ and this is what he maintains that Cooper

¹ Lawrence, "Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels", p.327.

² Chase, The American Novel, p.45.

³ Lawrence, "Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels", p.327.

⁴ Ibid., p.329.

has produced: a true, non-ironic, expository myth of the way in which a soul becomes whole, rather than an ironic myth whose structure is undermined by the fact of its own unsubstantiality and inevitable eclipse.

The proof of this fact lies in the energy of the naturalistic descriptions and the equal energy with which the virtue of the hero is represented. Rather than being merely "a fair example" as Cooper calls him, Natty Bumppo stands for the summation of all the talents and integrity necessary to the frontier situation without any suggestion of the attendant vices. As a man Natty is a paragon of excellence; as a symbol, his excellence is translated into mythic proportion, enabling him to stand as the foundation of the New World. Lawrence wishes to equate the rôle of Natty and Chingachgook and to place them side by side as co-representatives of the "new society". Of Cooper he writes:

...he dreamed a new human relationship. A stark, stripped human relationship of two men, deeper than the deeps of sex. Deeper than property, deeper than fatherhood, deeper than marriage, deeper than love. So deep that it is loveless. The stark, loveless, wordless unison of two men who have come to the bottom of themselves. This is the new nucleus of a new society, the clue to a new world-epoch.¹

¹ Ibid., p.321.

The love of which he writes is certainly present throughout the Tales, but the ultimate object of Leatherstocking's love is no one person and no one man. Admittedly the relationship between the hunter and the Indian is as profound as Lawrence states, but Leatherstocking's love had no specific object except for nature and the best of nature's creations. He can love Chingachgook so deeply only because he loves nature first. In The Deerslayer when Judith Hutter asks him outright whom he loves, attempting to elicit the name of one whom he could prefer to her, he tells her lyrically:

"She's in the forest, Judith - hanging from the boughs of the trees, in a soft rain - in the dew on the open grass - the clouds that float about in the blue heavens - the birds that sing in the woods - the sweet springs where I slake my thirst - and in all the other glorious gifts that come from God's Providence." (p.129)

It is because of the way in which he can totally immerse himself in nature, and indirectly in the personality of the creator of nature, that he can form relationships with others of mankind, particularly those, like Chingachgook, with whom he shares a common perception of the evidence of the creator in the beauty and majesty of nature. Just as the Leatherstocking can learn from his Indian friends so he can learn from nature. He tells Judith that there is no need of churches as places of worship while the wilderness

is available, for it is inconceivable to him that anyone should live long in the woods and not be aware of the hand of God (p.409). Also nature can speak personally to him, as in the episode when Hurry Harry attempts to shoot a buck for no reason and the echo of his rifle rolls round the hills sounding to Deerslayer like the voice of nature complaining against the intended wastefulness (p.47).

Apart from the close identification between the hero and the spirit of nature, the apprehension of his mythic status emerges from the way in which he conducts himself at all times and in all situations throughout the Tales. Observing this, David Brian Davis perceives in the Deerslayer a symbol of Christian virtue and manhood analogous to the chivalric knight whose code was also to honour God, to fight, and to display his Christian virtue at all times.¹ This similarity provides an illuminating basis of comparison though it may not be so comprehensive as Mr. Davis suggests. He writes of Cooper being required to give "religious sanction to his American hero" in order to justify his hero as "a true Christian symbol."² This seems to be overstating the case since the natural pietas of the character tends to de-emphasize his explicit Christianity, and Deerslayer might more properly be called a hero whose origins and outlook are Christian, rather than an overtly

¹ Davis, "Democratic Knight of the Wilderness", p.11

² Ibid., p.11.

Christian hero, in the chivalric sense, one of whose main functions is to champion Christianity at the expense of all else. Mr. Davis calls Cooper a moralist rather than a philosopher, which is to say that he expounded a particular point of view rather than that he sought elusive truth in the interplay of characters within the situation in which he conceived them.¹ This is certainly true: having begun to write in The Pioneers about the way in which the American consciousness would develop from its variety of ethnic origins, he began to realize that this was not the basic problem of becoming American. As he came to see it, the kernel of the problem lay in the fact of the white, Christian ethic being confronted by the American wilderness and what resultant reordering of spirit this would require. Through the personality of the Deerslayer, his last and most energetic portrayal, he celebrated the nature of the consciousness required to come to terms with the American situation. When Cooper had made this gradual realization, the nature of his legend necessarily becomes expository rather than analytic. But in tracing the way in which the nature of the problem and then the nature of the solution become apparent to Cooper, I cannot accept Davis' interpretation of the way in which Cooper imposes from above, in The Deerslayer, an organization which is not integrally

¹ Ibid., p.12.

connected with the subject matter of the narrative. Davis speaks of Cooper being,

forced to convert the uncouth and desolate
backwoods into the unspoiled and shimmering
world of God's original creation.¹

He seems not to realize that this Eden-like creation is really a perception of nature in terms of the benign consciousness and perception of the hero. Lake Glimmerglass is not a source of inspiration and moral perspicuity for all the protagonists: quite literally it is the burial ground of the Hutter family except for Judith who, though tainted by a worthless civilization, has the discrimination and sensitivity to respond to its beauty as well as its menace. Throughout the narrative it becomes apparent that man's evil can be communicated to nature to vilify the environment in proportion to man's wickedness, insensitivity and self-interest. At one point, when Hutter has been scalped alive, Hurry Harry has abandoned the party, and Deerslayer is pledged to surrender himself to torture and probably death at the hands of his enemies, Lake Glimmerglass takes a completely different aspect:

This was the spot where he had first laid
his eyes on the beautiful sheet of water on
which he floated. If it was then glorious in
the bright light of summer's noontide, it was
now sad and melancholy under the shadows of

¹ Ibid., p.11.

night. The mountains rose around it, like black barriers to exclude the outer world, and the gleams of pale light that rested on the broader parts of the basin were no bad symbols of the faintness of the hopes that were so dimly visible in his own future. (p.392)

Nature therefore becomes a symbol of the optimism endemic in the frontier situation when approached with piety, sensitivity and a strict devotion to a moral code founded upon white Christianity but modified to deal with a new environment. It is the total commitment to this code which Cooper depicts in the actions of his hero. In this light the chivalric knight does become a useful image in which to see the Deerslayer but, as I have shown earlier, it is the fact of devotion to a code which produces the largest basis of comparison and not the specifics of the individual codes themselves. In attempting to impose the complete chivalric ethic upon Deerslayer's conduct Davis finds a tension in the novel which really exists between the novel and the pattern he tries to impose upon it.

In many other respects his analysis of the book is excellent, though many of his best insights such as his comparison of the six days' action of the novel to the six days of creation,¹ do not seem to square with his central thesis: the Deerslayer's preservation of his asexual asceticism by resisting female advances does not seem to be a justifiable

¹ Ibid., pp.4-6.

ramification of the explicit Genesis-like situation. More probably the function of Judith Hutter in the tale is significant on a different level. As Cooper states in the Preface to The Deerslayer:

The intention has been to put the sisters in strong contrast: one admirable in person, clever, filled with the pride of beauty, erring and fallen; the other, barely provided with sufficient capacity to know good from evil. (p.v)

The author sees them very strongly as types: the beautiful, sensual Judith who has the vigour and sensitivity to achieve harmony with the rhythms of nature were she not already fallen; and the weak-minded Hetty unable to distinguish between the ideal and the actual, knowing only what is right, and unable to feel compassion or censure for what is wrong. Both sisters are therefore unequipped to identify themselves with nature in the wilderness. Cooper demonstrates this forcibly: Hetty is shot and killed by a "stray" bullet, and Judith goes off to England, the seat of evil itself in Cooper's frontier paradigm, to be mistress to her previous seducer.

What is further interesting about the women in The Deerslayer is that they do not exist within a formal plot engineered to bring about their eventual marriage. As Henry Nash Smith says of Cooper: "A novel, according to

canons which he considered binding, was a love story."¹ In each of the others of the Leatherstocking Tales, the formal white genteel hero and heroine are united in marriage. In spite of the fact that Judith Hutter is the most vigorous and convincing of Cooper's feminine characters, her involvement in a love story is minimized. She is "fallen", having been seduced by the English Captain before the action of the novel takes place, and she falls in love with the Deerslayer. But it is clear from the outset that her charms are not those which can win him and the love story of the novel revolves around Chingachgook and Wah-ta-Wah, two beings whose love is blest both by and in nature, with which they are at one.

Judith cannot win Deerslayer because his love is bespoken by the lake and the mountains, the cycle of the seasons, and the timeless beauty with which he is surrounded. Judith's guilt prohibits her participation in this eternal harmony, and her acceptance into the myth of "the onward march of the integral soul"² which Leatherstocking represents, symbol of the triumph of the white ethic in America.

In the concluding volume of the Leatherstocking Tales Cooper makes his most explicit statement upon the nature of his hero. This figure represents the consummation of all the virtues which the white man brought with him to America, and no antithetical pernicious qualities. In the author's

¹ Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land, p.71.

² Lawrence, "Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels", p.329.

exposition of this situation, the basic premise is his conviction that society in America can become organically sound, but must purify itself. The process of purification he equates with shedding the forms of the Old World, taking nothing at face value until proven to be beneficial and acceptable in the American situation. The Pioneers, whose events take place within a fledgeling society, describes the potential of that society for sound social advancement. This advancement is counterpointed by a retreat into the mythic past where exists a powerful symbol which both justifies that society, and stands as an example of outstanding virtue, strength and proficiency to be emulated by it.

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