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## UNIT 1 THE BEGINNINGS

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### Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 The Defining Focus of the American Character
  - 1.1.1 The Moral, Religious, and Philosophical Aspects
  - 1.1.2 American Philosophy in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century
- 1.1 Main characteristics of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Novel
- 1.2 Themes and Patterns of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Novel
- 1.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.4 Questions
- 1.5 Suggested Reading

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### 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, we study the creative matrix of the nineteenth century novel in its moral, religious, philosophical and cultural conditions, which shaped the American novel of that time. The rallying point of the adolescent American character then was the energetic faith in the American experiment in sanctioning and achieving individual liberty.

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### 1.1 AMERICAN CHARACTER OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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For Taine, a literary text is created out of the union of the "race, moment and milieu." This is all the more true in a new nation and newer form of creative expression, where literature seeks to represent a reality which never believes in realising itself into a settled monolith. As ceaseless innovation to achieve its own promise of New World of hope of human beings, its creative expression seeks a distinct identity and spirit. It seeks to be independent but not isolated. Its aim is to be a path-finder, to define the perfect ways of society, politics and governance, culture and philosophy.

Starting its long, unending journey from its Puritanical moorings, its journey is purposefully unsettled. It desires its continuous energy out of this restless quest for being something innovative and leading the world by its ideals. Quite rightly, Commager describes the American character as "always the product of an interplay of inheritance and environment". It is this complex and inalienable relationship of its inheritance from the British and European, going back to the roots of the ancient Greece and Rome that is the shaping (not petrifying) influence on its psyche. As it derived its basic institutions of State, Church and Family, which define their fundamental values, the influence of the environment was decisive. Its rich social, geographical diversity in a synthesis with its vast sense of space, invitation to mobility, the atmosphere of independence and encouragement to opportunity and optinities – all created a firm stamp of new ways of thinking and redefining man's genius. Out of this vast sense of rich reservoir of almost eternal source of nature's wealth, inspired by a will to venture, define the fundamental trait of the American character namely, the optimism, as a way of thinking and feeling and living and achieving together.

Out of this of enterprising sense of optimism arose the American idea of progress. As programmes was not abstraction, in itself, but a common place of experience to

the American he saw it daily in the transformation of wilderness into a farm land, in the growth of villages into cities, in the steady rise of community and nation to wealth and power. As he planned ambitiously with a doubtless spirit of endeavour, he passionately believed that nothing was beyond his power and always aimed and reached triumphant goals. For him, as for the Europeans (from where he had taken the tradition) past was not historical, as for him, what mattered most was his living and endeavouring in the future. As this constructive optimism was realised as a sense of power of vast reserves of energy, with spacious trees, his imagination roamed a continent. His very folklore was on a large-scale, with such empire builders so closely approximated to folklore, such as Paul Bunyans and Mike Finks. It is easy to confuse real and legendary characters, such as Daniel Boone (on whom Cooper might have modelled his Natty Bumppo), David Crockett and Sam Houston. They belong to mythology and history, alike. Because his imagination was constantly challenged by the realities of geography and history, he was receptive to large plans and heroic speculations.

As his endeavour was practical, his culture, too, was material. He took contest for granted and preached the gospel of hard work and regarded rootlessness to any particular place not a vice. He liked wealth, without being ostentatious. Whatever promised to increase wealth was regarded as good and he was tolerant of the exploitation of natural resources and manifestation of the cult of industrialism. This sense of venturing in achieving greater material worth made him intensely practical in all matters. He was endlessly ingenious and resourceful, he was always ready to improvise new tools or techniques to meet new urgencies. An innovator to the core, he borrowed readily from Indian or immigrant and naturalised what he borrowed. He improved instinctively and constantly tried improvements, without any respect for custom. He was the happiest when he could find a mechanical solution to his problems.

Mere theories and speculations disturbed him and he avoided abstruse philosophies of government. No philosophy not grounded in practical wisdom and true common sense appealed to him. If any, "instrumentalism" is one philosophy that is always native to his instinct.

### **1.1.1 The Moral, Religious, and Philosophical Aspects**

His religion, with its Calvinistic roots, too, was practical. He was religious, without being devout. Instead of a faith in the doctrine of salvation by grace, he naturally believed in the doctrine of salvation by work. He did not believe in the Devil. The most significant aspects of his two most original religions – Mormonism and Christian Science were the practical ones. In politics, too, he profoundly mistrusted the abstract and doctrinaire. Without believing in the exactions of any political philosophy, he formed his own mature and unfailing political judgement by common sense. His cultural attitudes were also based on their practical compulsion and useful value.

To him, as wilderness was the true paradise, he proclaimed his moral superiority through it. This assumption of superiority was accompanied by a sense of destiny and mission. Pioneering in spirit and adventurous in action, with a will to succeed, American character had an endless inclination to experiment, in all forms of human endeavour. As America itself was an experiment in the history of man's civilization, he was a self-reliant man, who continuously "made" the American mind.

These qualities of the American character are sufficiently formed and enriched during the literature, thinking and culture of the nineteenth century. Its four important qualities are: (1) faith in progress; (2) validity of democracy; (3) a sense of equality everywhere in all aspects and walks of life, and (4) the ultimate triumph of right over wrong.

Through out the nineteenth century, the sense of equality permeated American's life and thought. His conduct and work and play, his language and literature, his religion and politics and it essentially conditioned and defined all aspects of his life. Equality was all pervasive, in politics, society, cultural and psychological life. There was a quest for economic equality in the sense that there was the absence of class distinctions, though not the triumph over them. Wherever men and women met, they met on the basis of equality. Leadership fluctuated and was dictated by the situation itself rather than by antecedent social position. As education reflected the social values, the public school was the great leveller. The sense of ingenuity and physical prowess were the distinct qualities of success. This sense of equality introduced an ease and sincerity into social relationships. Love as a form of companionship penetrated the class barriers. Talent also brought many opportunities for individual performance. Due to this sense of equality, the poor did not feel the burden of inequality. Few outward signs of rank were tolerated. This sense of equality was also manifested more clearly in the American manners. Americans conducted themselves pretty much as their kindly and genuine instincts dictated. Their manners were flexible and appeared to be not so rigid or punctilious. In the political life, this spirit of equality, not simply as a democratic principle, but a sort of collective sharing of power and responsibility was prominent. Not much significance was added to the role and might of the military in society, except in times of war.

He was apparently careless about his work and his trade and preferring to have machines work for him. He regarded with equanimity, the decline of the inherited traditions of craftsmanship. He was careless also of class, rank and prerogatives of others as well as of his own. He took little pride in a finished job, prizing versatility above thoroughness. Though the world's most successful farmer, his cultivation was not intensive. The Americans had two schools of thought, namely transcendentalism and pragmatism. They rarely stayed at a single place. With abundant faith in the next generation, an American never leaves behind anything for the future. It was easier then to cultivate in the new soil and explore new investments than continue with the old traditions and practices.

The American attitude towards authority, rules and regulations was not significant. A paradox exists when he had no great respect for when rules, he, nevertheless, praised his Constitution and government for his greatness. By the twin causes of his confidence in the superiority of his constitutional authority and prosperity, they tended to be lenient towards dissent and non-conformity. He knew that America was founded in dissent. Individualism, a prime quality of the American character, also was based on non-conformity. Nature, too, conspired with history to justify heterodoxy. In the nineteenth century, non-conformity was indulged out of good nature rather than respect for the principle. His sense of discipline was imposed by circumstances than by the state.

However, for all his individualism, he was much given to cooperative undertakings. They waited on the interest of the individual of the group and they discovered that men could come together and make a church and their churches were voluntary organizations. They found that men could come together and make a state and the constitutional convention was their most original political contribution. Though he did not always observe the morals of the Puritans, he accepted without question the moral standards of the Puritans. White women were safe anywhere. Chastity was taken for granted before and fidelity after marriage. This is obvious in the portrayal of Alice and Cora in *The Last of the Mohicans*. The social position of women was an elevated one. They were treated with honour and given many opportunities in their intellectual development. In all matters of the church and the school, women took the lead. They not only controlled education and religion, they largely dictated the standards of literature and art. While his sentimentalism was deep and spontaneous the American was closer to the French man than to that of the German. He was sentimental about Nature in her grander aspects and liked rhetoric in his orators (as we find it in Natty Bumppo). He thought the whole history of his country was

romantic and heroic. Instead of revelling in the anachronistic history of the past European feudal castles and knights, he romanticized his own history of the Pilgrim and the Puritan, the Indian, whom he fought, the cowboy, the miner and the trapper. As he was always victorious, he variously mythicised in sentiment and romance all the vanquished. Imagination and enthusiasm, combined with sentiment characterized his sentiment. Humour, which was as pervasive as unfailing optimism, was a national trait. As it existed universally in the American mind, its practitioner brought rare delight and unique character to the American imagination. Humour thus, in its myriad manifestations, such as that of the yankees, Negroes and cowboys all had their special dialects. From Benjamin Franklin to Mark Twain, it was fundamentally outrageous. It celebrated the grotesque and the ludicrous with unruffled gravity. In a way, Nature in American humour displaced society in the British sort of humour.

### 1.1.2 American Philosophy in the XIX Century

American philosophy of the XIX Century was like its American character of the century, "an amalgam of inheritance and experience". As Puritanism, rationalism and idealism, were the three major sources of American philosophy, each was naturalized, without the sectarian denominations and Puritanism permeated the secular thought. The enlightenment, too, unlike in Europe could perform the task of illumination without war or revolution. In America, as the opposites could fuse themselves; "its alchemy was tranquil and pervasive". The American had found felicity in the New World, and his philosophy justified a genial view of Providence and Nature, a romantic concept of man and a healthy interpretation of history. As he cultivated the spirit of individualism, there was enough room for experimentation and creative use of his free will. As he was practical, his philosophy, too, served utilitarian purposes. His imagination depended in his free will. Philosophy was an active instrument and a provocation as well as a rationalization and a rule. He accepted ideas without rigorous inquiry into their validity by innovatively synthesizing the philosophical ideas of the past from the English, French, German and even Indian source. He could evolve his own system, most suited to his pragmatic needs, based on his common sense. Yet, inspite of the disinterest in formal philosophy or indulge in metaphysical speculation, they formulated with enough conviction and unanimity, a common view of the cosmic processes and their significance to man. Acknowledging their belief in the binding force a moral law, they formed their institutions.

American thought, which was essential to its American character, was based on the unfailing sense of optimism with the sense of spacious universe with confidence in the infinite possibilities of human development and with reverence for a righteous God and a just moral code. Believing in immutable laws, governing the universe, yet still leaving enough possibility for the operation of free will, they were confident that their reason was able to competent to observe these laws and will was strong enough to observe them. They believed secular law to be but a transcription of the Law of Nature and Nature's God and accorded it appropriate respect. Fully acknowledging the supremacy and sovereign efficacy of the Higher Law, they held human institutions valid only when in conformity to it. They worshipped a God, who was just but benevolent and who "delighted in the happiness of man here and his greater happiness hereafter". They revelled in a nature that was exacting but beneficent and found its generosity a sure sign of providential sanction of grace.

It is, indeed, a fact of vital significance that, though they did not acquiesce in the doctrine of man's original depravity and man's insignificance inspite of their fundamental faith in the supremacy and power of God. On the contrary, they continued their faith in man's capacity for qualities of divinity in his action and capability for infinite moral improvement, and was destined, ultimately, for perfection. Although sin and Devil persisted in confessions of faith, both were banished from the popular consciousness. American held all the men to be equal in God's sanction of grace. As he combined the political idea of democracy and the moral and religious aspect of brotherhood of mass, they practised the values of liberty

in all their social order and law and commonwealth. As they passionately believed and practised freedom of each individual, without pride in their individual excellence, but with a deep sense of gratitude to God. Self-reliance in their own fundamental capacities, became a sort of impelling drive to all their thoughts and actions. Thus, individualism became Americanism. To this extent, as the rich and spacious continent dazzled but not confounded their imagination, their conquest of it inspired in them a sense of limitless power. For us, these ideals of Nature and religion form the central tenets of the behaviour of Cooper's Leatherstocking hero, Natty Bumppo, the man "without a cross". Like the true, American, he recognized the sovereignty of the conscience. Temperate and democratic, Natty Bumppo followed the majority verdict.

In their literary imagination, this spirit of liberty and quest for individual perfection, morally and materially, centrally defined the consciousness of their heroes and heroines. All of them (at least upto the XIX Century) were rural heroes, as their imagination was formed by country living. His poetry, and mythology were formed by country living. No novel of city life caught the imagination of those writers. As in Cooper's pastoral images, the country folk eulogised the felicities of the farm and considered the farmer the beloved of God. As Natty Bumppo so insistently declares to Harward. "Lord, Major, I should be but a poor scholar for one who had studied so long in the wilderness, did not I know how to set forth the movements and nature' of such a beast." (p.303). They read books and psalms in the wild nature. Poets and composers of songs at that time delighted themselves in the simple and inostensible objects of nature, the meditative joy of the country-side and the love of the past. As their qualities of primieval innocence and pristine purity were reflected in the childhood or adolescent dreams, boyhood was glorified as an important form of exploring human consciousness. No other literature has exploited the myths and dreams of the adolescent psyche. Natty Bumppo's pristine purity and innocence, even Uncas' pure mind and David's and Alice's and Cora's sentiments – all carry the authentic spontaneity of the childhood feelings. Everywhere, those characters lived in the pastoral or rural ambience. In contrast to this, the urban milieu provided the opposite set of values of a corrupt mind. Everybody, like Uncas, had a high sense of honour. He was brave and stood up for himself, fought for his rights and fought fairly, himself. Throughout the whole of these trying moments, Uncas has alone preserved his serenity. He looked on the preparations with a steady eye, and when the tormentos came to seize him, he met him with a firm and upright attitude. He was gregarious, loyal to his companions and rarely cherished enmities and chivalrous toward women, Respective towards the grown-ups, he was thoughtless rather than unkind. Gifted with a lively imagination, he lived in a world (like Natty Bumppo) of the Indians, cowboys and pirates. Like Natty Bumppo, he was superstitious but not religious. Fair in his dealings with others, he scorned every form of meanness. He was simple and democratic, without knowing the distinctions of class or colour and resented snobbery. He made friends readily with the poor and the shiftless and he was uncomfortable with wealth. Every one about him worked hard and he took upon himself a heavy burden of chores and did them with varying desires of faithfulness. He lived close to nature. He believed in a world of his own. He was a part of the work around. Cooper's Leatherstocking hero immortalizes all these qualities.

For the American character of the nineteenth century, history was a story and romance, a record of battles of deeds and daring as in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*. They were designed to point a moral and adorn a tale, and even if the tale was exotic, the moral was always relevant to the American experience. Perhaps, an important trait of the American character was its great patriotism for education. The leaders in schools inculcated the value of patriotism, industry, obedience to parents the virtue of work. They taught that life was real and earnest. They promised that right would triumph in the end. It represented at its best, "the Arcadian simplicity". In the nineteenth century, it was closer to the Calvinism of the seventeenth century and sustained most Americans in the XIX Century. However, after this century of "Arcadian simplicity" and Nature, pristine purity, the life in the next century, celebrated business rather than adventure.

## 1.2 MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY NOVEL

These qualities of the nineteenth century American life, in its complex impact of tradition and environment, moral, religious, philosophical and expansionist purposes are sufficiently reflected in the novel form, in the writings of at least three major novelists, namely Washington Irving, Edgar Allen Poe, James Fennimore Cooper, Melville and Hawthorne.

There may be two important concerns for the novelists of the nineteenth century American, in an interrelated manner. The main concern of these writers is to portray the individual's relationship with his society. If in writers like Cooper and Mark Twain, this many-sided relationship of the individual to his society was portrayed directly, by dealing with his morals by signifying characters like the Leatherstocking hero (in Cooper's novels) as the edifice morality in life; Melville and Hawthorne, by romanticizing the mysterious and mythicizing the reality, dealt with the contemporary social reality, indirectly. In any case, man *vis-a-vis* his society is the core concern of the nineteenth century American novelist. Also, as the American novel is different in its very definition, by its historical reasons of the formation of the American character, its definitions of the novelistic form varies with that of a European connotation of a novel. For, if the nineteenth century European novel described a settled social reality, with its main concern for the class conflict in a bourgeois milieu, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century American novel, by its reasons of historically evolving of a new society had to deal with a still forming society. It was the land of social experimentation "in exploring" the bases of moral values in individual's relationship with his society. In this sense, according to Lionell Trilling, "the American writers of the genius have not turned their minds to society". Further, he says that, the American novelists at that time sought only "a tangential" relationship to society. The real basis of the novel has never existed in America because, there was no tension between a middle class and the aristocracy.

In any case, the main purpose of the American novel in the 19th century was to describe the complex of ideas and ideals which defined the beginnings of the great American experiment, in the New World, with its own kind of religion, culture and compulsions of environment and history. If the 19th century English novel studied the impact of society on the individual in Dickens and George Eliot, in the American novel of the same time, it was defining an individual, with his staunch commitment to (more than anything else), his authentic and unmistakable stamp of individualism. So, for the American mind, the insistence on the individual as the only proper unit of a social definition and the idea that society was "an invention" of civilization, so that one could destroy it by simply wishing it away" was an important idea. For, in the American mind, of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in place of an European concept of class-laden society, we have, the experience of community life. This is an unstated ideal. It is an aspect of individual freedom without degenerating into selfishness and irresponsibility. It creates a set of values for relationship between individuals in forming a morally viable social living, without the threats of greed, acquisitiveness and cruelty. This idea of natural sentiment of piety in moral values in human relationships is best expressed in the writings of Jhon Winthrop, who says that we should always keep "before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body". This idea of community living in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century reflected the original settlement of the Christian ideas, which inspired the initial Puritan pilgrims. It was the religious fervour, which formed the quintessential spirit of describing an individual as part of a selfless community life. Thus, as in Cooper's frontier imagination, the wilderness is an image of ideal relationship of man in a near pastoral situation, through the figure of Daniel Boone and his Western myth. Here, the main purpose is to reconcile the individual freedom,

(such as that of Natty Bumppo), with the social life, without loss of his moral, spiritual and emotional needs.

However, this idea of the individual and his community life in a continuum was modified with the intervention of the economic forces. According to Crevecoeur, the individual and social progress in the new nation, without the exploiting institutions of monarchy or a corrupt church or selfish nobility, was not possible, in material terms, for generating more wealth, merely by practising the romantic values of piety and simplicity of the frontier. He, therefore, saw the nineteenth century individual, essentially in economic terms by sharing the enlightened view (as also expressed by Benjamin Franklin), that "human character is environmentally decided". He showed a consistent belief in the virtues of expanding civilization. The new democracy would assure "the rewards of industry" and "his labour is founded on the basis of nature". For him, the sea had no "romantic" or metaphysical association. It was only a setting for the fishing industry and for trade. Ralph Gabriel also corroborating with this view, believed that individualism was the most dominant force behind the developments of the nineteenth century society and literature. These contending economic forces in the lives of the individuals led to the breaking down of social institutions, leading to a new way of comprehending the individual and his relationship with his society. Thus, it was realized that more individualism in creating an atomistic society of isolated human beings without concern for the collective moral and social purpose became another concern in the nineteenth century novel in America, apart from the already existing romantic (and social) tradition of Cooper. In the writings of the elder Henry James, there was an effort at relating the metaphysical to the social aspect of life. He believed that the universal brotherhood and the destruction of selfhood were the important qualities of the nineteenth century imagination.

Thus, the nineteenth century American novel essentially dramatized the aspirations of the individual in relation to his society first in the agrarian conditions, then in the realms of emerging economic forces. Finally, the aspect of relating man's social life to the larger metaphysical concerns proved another important dimension. In any case, it was the essential portrayal of the individual in his various levels and forms of relationship with his society that was the main concern of the nineteenth century American novel.

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### 1.3 THEMES AND PATTERNS

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Novelists of the 19th Century American may be considered at one level, as "social visionaries." American novel of the 19th century, though gained its inspiration in its form from the contemporary British novel, is nevertheless, greatly different from it. If the British novelists of the mid-nineteenth century, like Dickens, Disraeli and Gaskell, wrote with a reformatory zeal, the American novelists of that period did not have any such interest in reforming the society. On the other hand, they mostly employed their moral energy in portraying evil within man's social environment when they were bedevilled by such moral issues in society, as slavery the race question, child labour and democratic equality. Perhaps, because of the compulsive individual liberty, which is part of the American experiment, these novelists' concern for the collective social welfare was not of the same kind, as for example in Dickens. The American novelist's imagination worked for creating ideal social communities. Based on individual liberty, they visualized perfect images of society, making these works appear more as visionary than reformatory in their purpose. Children or the adolescent dreams of perfection is an important quality of the American fiction of this period. They served as tools for the novelist's dispassionate moral and social commentators. They acted as a means of satire or irony. Mark Twain uses children extensively for the purpose of social criticism. Unlike Dickens, the American novelist makes his child heroes, or heroes with the purity of mind, to reject the society for its evil, to create their own world of purity, as Huck in Mark Twain's

novels and Natty Bumppo in Leatherstocking tales. The heroes of the American fiction of that time affirmed the vitality of the American myth in the pre-Civil war period, in which the individual freedom was unfettered by social restrictions. As society does not impinge on the individual liberty, it does not find any definable place in the American novel, unlike in the English novel, and this is perhaps, the main distinction between the English and American novel of the 19th century. As organized society does not play any important role in the American novels, the heroes, too, engage in social conflict, only in pursuit of their ideal relationship or in passionate struggles with the existing social order. In the process, they turn away from it. It also means that the American fictional hero, instead of reforming society, by rejecting it, explores his metaphysical relations elsewhere as in Melville, to some extent. Thus, the American fictional hero is concerned with the exploration of essentially social themes at personal and metaphysical levels, making the American novel different from its source, that is, the English novel. Truly, thus, the American novel of the nineteenth century continued to reflect the ideal of the individual liberty to achieve near perfection, which is part of the larger American experiment in the New World. Its protagonist, a torch bearer for human progress, carries this light of civilization, in his innocence, naivete, dreams and conflicts of conscience, for ever. He continues his role as a passionate chronicler of this American experiment with unflagging involvement and commitment, to make the novel of the nineteenth century a part of the cultural and metaphysical history of this vibrant nation.

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## 1.4 LET US SUM UP

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Thus, we have discussed in this Unit, the main cultural, religious and other experiences, which shaped the nineteenth century American imagination. Evolving itself with the clear mandate for all-round autonomy for achieving the national spirit, it generally outgrew its original (mostly Puritanical) purposes in literature. It is now in its own self, not so European, or English. It is quintessentially American. This spirit of the American character is most evocatively rendered in the portrayal of the American protagonist, in Cooper's Leatherstocking tales, Melville's cosmic imagination and Mark Twain's portrayal of Huck and Hawthorne's exploration of the romance of the mystery. Thus, in the next Unit, we will further explore the characteristically romantic spirit of the 19th century in its myth and symbol, and revivifying images of the American dream of the past and its vision of the future, as conceived at that time.

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## 1.5 QUESTIONS

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- 1 Discuss the qualities of the American character of the 19th century.
- 2 What are the moral, religious ideas defining the American mind of the nineteenth century.
- 3 Discuss the characteristics of the 19th century American novel.
- 4 Discuss the main themes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American novel, vis-à-vis those of the 19<sup>th</sup> century British novel.

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## 1.6 SUGGESTED READING

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H.S. Commanger *The American Mind*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

A.N. Kaul *The American Vision*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.

V.L. Parrington *Main Currents of American Thought*, Vol. II. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927.

Van Wyck Brooks *The Writer in America*. NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1953.

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## UNIT 2 THE MAN, THE MILIEU, AND THE MOMENT

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### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Qualities of Self-trust and Expansion
- 2.2 Romanticism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century America
- 2.3 Romance in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Novel
- 2.4 Novel Vs Romance
- 2.5 Washington Irving, and Edgar Allen Poe
  - 2.5.1 Washington Irving (1783-1859)
  - 2.5.2 Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849)
- 2.6 Life and Works of James F. Cooper
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Questions
- 2.9 Suggested Reading

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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Here, let us study the development of the Romanticism of the nineteenth century America, by virtue of its self-trust as a new nation on the throes of an experiment and multifarious expansion. Though it took its inspiration from the European Romanticism, it redefined the spirit of the Romantic according to its demands of an emerging past. For America, Romance is synonymous with its social, political and cultural perfection of the new country. To the same extent, its narrative form, essentially closer to the Romantic form than to the novel form, is enriched by the nineteenth century masters, namely, Irving, Cooper, Melville and Hawthorne. Finally, in this Unit, we study the literary ambience of the early nineteenth century in the writings of Irving, Poe and Cooper.

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### 2.1 QUALITIES OF SELF-TRUST AND EXPANSION

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The literary mind of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American novel was shaped by two experiences : intense self-trust and a sense of vast expansion in all forms, geographic, economic and cultural aspects. Self-trust in the capabilities of the people themselves became the spirit of nationalism. Born in the political and philosophical debate of the eighteenth century Europe, the doctrine became a self-conscious demand for native arts, customs and a native language. Now, as the frontier moved towards the Pacific, geography gave nationalism a new context. The impact of a new world, with its tremendous resources and its frontier gave a fresh incisiveness and strength to nationalism. With the disappearance of the division of opinion in the later 18th century between monarchists and republicans, the feeling of the success of the Republicanism became prevalent. The Americans came to believe that, their republic was neither the mirage nor the chaos that the European reactionaries had anticipated. It became a practical concern. Out of the older concepts of natural law and natural rights, American liberals developed the new doctrine of popular sovereignty. The honest concern of the American people for the welfare of all mankind gave them a certain dignity. Expansion, which was the result of self-trust of the people in themselves, wrote its own history. In the years from the Revolution to 1820, there was a multiplicity of the land area and population. Americans were the masters of three million square miles of land. The nation was still predominantly agrarian, inspite the tendencies of growth of industry and capitalism. Though there were deep

and wide cleavages between aristocracy and democracy, it gave a new voice to the poor, as a result of the triumph of the Jacksonianism.

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## 2.2 ROMANTICISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

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Romanticism in America took shape out of these twin qualities of self-trust and expansion. For, self-trust and expansion led to the importance of optimism not only as a religious cult, but also as a way of thinking and living. Individualism is also another quality, making individual achieve perfection and greater productivity in all forms and fronts of human activity; Liberty in thinking and action is the main quality of individualism. Hence, these qualities of optimism, individual liberty and a ceaseless desire for man's progress and perfection in all walks of life form the main qualities of Romanticism in literature in America.

In Europe, the romantic spirit gradually strengthened from the middle of the 19th Century, in particular, in Germany France and England. It may not be any organized, system of thought, as it is a particular attitude defining man's aspirations, his understanding of nature and society. It took imaginative roots in writers such as Wordsworth, Keats and Coleridge, even before it expressed itself in the New World. Revolting against the neo-classical spirit of the earlier century, Romanticism preferred freedom to formalism in all walks of life and worshipped individualism as a cult. They displaced authority with the liberty of the individual. Man is mostly capable of self-reliant action and thinking. He exalted the imagination above either rationalism or strict adherence to factual apprehension of reality. By rejecting the validity of material knowledge, he enthroned intuition as the most valuable form of understanding man's true self. The Romantics gave credence to faith, than to mere reason. Romanticism emphasised the importance of the sub-conscious as demonstrated in Emerson's institutionalism and in the portrayal of the abnormal psychology by Poe and Hawthorne.

Its view of nature as a symbol of primieval innocence and man and woman as the symbols of originally divine Adam and Eve and nature as an eternal source of moral and spiritual wisdom and a symbol of Beauty and Truth, as in the poetry of Wordsworth, Bryant or Longfellow significantly defined the new imaginative traditions of the nineteenth century America. Curiosity as a way of exploring the unknown and the mysterious inspired the imagination of Coleridge and Poe, if only, medievalism inspired the poetic imagination of Keats and Lowell.

Humanitarianism is one important quality of Romanticism. By romanticizing the "common man", it led to an age of reform movements. It developed a fundamental enthusiasm for the primitive – for the ancient ballads, epics and folk literature and glorifying the image of Rousseau's "noble savage". In particular, it led to create humour and burlesque in the American imagination. Romanticism produced a luxuriant new literature in every country with the recurrent qualities of opulence and freedom, devotion to individualism, a reliance upon man's good nature and "natural man" and abiding faith in the boundless resources of the human spirit and imagination.

These romantic instincts of rebellion against the established order and an endlessly optimistic vision of man's capabilities for perfection took their origin from the American and French Revolutions. The period of Cooper, Bryant and Irving was one of ceaseless optimism in man's capacities for good nature and excellence. The buoyant American nation, soon after independence, created its freedom of spirit over and over again, in two diplomatic victories over the French, in leading the world against the Barbary pirates in resisting British pretensions by war in 1812 and in

announcing its western hegemony by the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. Internally, it expanded the American dominion from the North-West Territory to Oregon, from Louisiana to the Rockies, through the South-West from Texas to California, by the Mexican war. This geographical expansion propelled the romantic imagination of writers like Cooper, Irving and Bryant, in describing the world of expansion, as a form of nation's progress and human perfection in the New World. Natty Bumppo and the world of the savages in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* lived the spirit of romantic adventure, and innocence in their purest form. However, as if mere robust optimism might not solve some of the problems, the spirit of questioning romanticism found its first great American representatives in writers, like Poe and Hawthorne. They sought the reality of man in the hidden recesses of the mind and spirit and probed their obscure sources of behaviour and moral judgement. Like Keats and Coleridge, Poe embodied his revelations in aesthetic symbolism, except in his detective and science tales. In contrast, Hawthorne, by employing a penetrating sense of history, found his symbolism in man's conflict with the vestiges of the past, indelibly fixed in his moral nature and his social environment. Poe, by his symbolic idealism, to an advanced degree, became the inspiration of the French symbolists. Melville, like Hawthorne was obsessed by the enigma of evil, by drawing symbols from land and sea for his exploration into the heart of the universe.

However, the ideas of self-trust and expansion, leading to widespread production of wealth created its own set of problems in the 19th Century, in the form of an increasing territory, population and industrial activity. During the thirty years before the Civil War, the population increased from thirteen to thirty million Americans. Although nearly half of America's population pushed beyond the Alleghenies by 1840, there were already at that time, increasing concentrations in eastern urban and industrial centres, where recent migrants accounted for about 12% of the nation. The remarkable development of industry and financial institutions was accompanied by economic crisis and a kind of poverty that was unknown to the younger agrarian America. Even the frontier was not without its problems of endless labour and limited educational opportunities. If the election of Jefferson in 1800 is regarded as breaking the authority of the rich, well-known and the "able", the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 with a direct mandate from the common people is a significant event in the history of the nation. His election signalled the increasing determination of these masses to be heard in the national government. To this extent, Cooper's acceptance of the Jacksonian form of ideology, differs from his father's belief in the righteousness of aristocracy of the Federalists, expresses the changing will of the nation. For these masses, the problem of Negro slavery was a threat to the enterprise of the free man. Also, the spirit of expansion of the frontier and the moral abhorrence, which impelled the North, was influential in precipitating the Civil War.

A widespread respect for the common man and a belief in his capacities was reflected in all the writers. Bryant, who espoused the human and civil rights, supported the nascent labour movement and many other reforms, gradually opposed the extension of slavery. Hawthorne and Melville regarded the improvement of society as indispensable for the spirit of mankind. In this century, after Cooper, Irving and Poe, the transcendentalists, supported various reforms, in particular, the abolition of slavery. This reforming spirit infused the writings of such New England thinkers and writers as Longfellow, Lowell and Holmes. New reform movements and organizations flourished at that time, in the 19th Century. Well-directed groups tried to improve the standards of criminology and provide rehabilitation instead of punishment. The American Temperance Society was founded in 1846. The women's rights movement drew such strong leaders on Margaret Fuller. The first women's Congress was held at New York in 1845. It called for equality with men in educational opportunities and employment, in marriage and property ownership. They campaigned for factory reforms affecting women and child workers, especially in the New England cotton mills.

In religion, the unitarian church in the early 19<sup>th</sup> and late 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was based on the idea of Enlightenment of man. It was formed by optimistic men. In the name of reason and common sense, they rejected the Puritan notion of the innate depravity of man. As found in Natty Bumppo in *The Last of the Mohicans*, they created a theology based on man's innate goodness and his spiritual freedom in a universe presided over by a benevolent God.

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### 2.3 ROMANCE IN THE 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN NOVEL

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The American novel has a unique quality in its tenor and purpose, from that of the English novel. As it has to represent a complex reality of an unsettled or settling order, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, its main quality may be described as "contradictions and representing extreme ranges of experience", ranging from melodramatic actions to pastoral idyls. If, in contrast, the English novel, comparatively speaking, had centrality and equality of judgement, in the American novel, there was "a profound poetry of disorder", consisting of oddity, distortion of personality, dislocations of normal life and malignancy of motive. Though the English novelist has not been always strictly tragic or Christian, often it has been comic of a superior variety, approaching tragedy. Usually, it has been realistic or even "naturalistic". In contrast, the American novel, without being stirred by the possibility of catharsis or incarnation has been inspired by the aesthetic possibilities of expressing the radical forms of alienation, contradictions and disorder. According to Richard Chase, the American novel is a development of the English traditions, at least upto 1880 or 1890. If the high purpose of the English novel is bringing order to disorder, the American novel, according to D.H. Lawrence (in his *Studies in Classical American Literature*) is always committed "to explore rather than to appropriate and civilize" the unexplored yet important territories of human life in the New World. Its aim is "to discover a new place and a new state of mind", making it more profound than the English novel. It, in the processes, "carves out experience brilliant and highly wrought fragments rather than massive unities". According to Allen Tate, there is "a complexity of feeling" in the American novel. For sometime, "the states of feeling and the language" in which they are caught are sometimes very intricate in the American novels. Bewley explains the reasons of this tension in his essay called, "Fennimore Cooper and the Ecomic Age" in his book *Eccentricity of Design*. According to him, this tension in Cooper, Hawthorne and James, was due to "the struggle to close the split in American experience". This split was between Europe and America, liberalism and reaction, aggressive economics and benevolent wealth. To this extent, according to Bewley, the best American novelists like Faulkner, Milville, Cooper and Hawthorne, achieved "their energy and their force from the perception and acceptance not of unities but of radical disunities". However, according to Richard Chase, the beauty and force of the American novel is in keeping the disunities intact, but not in unifying them into some sort of an order, as in the English novel. In any case, these contradictions of beliefs, which have energised the American imagination in the novel form, can be traced to three facts: first, there is the solitary position in which man has been placed in this country by Puritanism and later by the frontier conditions, like Natty Bumppo living in his morally secluded conditions of pure existence in the frontier; second, the American puritanism with its New England's excessive concern with morality, seems more interested in the melodrama of the eternal struggle of good and evil; third, the conflict in the American arises because of the American's dual allegiance to the old world and the New World.

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### 2.4 NOVEL VS ROMANCE

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As in the American literary imagination, romantic form, not the novel form (as understood in the English literary context) is the mainstay, it is useful if we

distinguish between the romance and novel, as two literary forms. The main difference, perhaps, arises with regard to their attitude to reality. The novel renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. It takes a group of people and describes their existence in the novel. We see these people in their real complexity of temperament and motive. They are in good relation to nature, to each other, to their social class, to their own past. Character is more important than action and plot. The events portrayed are plausible. In its historical presentation and purposes, the novel served the interest and aspirations of the vibrant middle-class.

By contrast, the romance, following its distantly medieval origins, renders reality in lesser plenitude. It tends to prefer action to character, and action will be freer in a romance than in a novel. Atleast, this is true in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*. The romance can flourish without much of an inter-relationship between characters. These mostly two-dimensional characters, as "good" or "bad" types of the human nature, will hardly be related to each other or to the past. They will be shown in ideal relation among themselves. Each character "symbolises" an idea. In the American romance, unlike in the English novels, classes do not so much signify any identity, according to a class. To a significant degree, characters become somewhat abstract and ideal and merely functional in their relationship to plot. Being less committed to the immediate compulsions of a tangible historical reality, the romance may take the form of the mythical, allegorical and symbolic forms.

Historically, in the course of its development, the American novel achieved a sort of an imaginative hybrid, between the novel form and the romance. Though the greatest American fiction has tended towards the romance than the greatest European fiction, the American novel is part of the great European tradition of the novel, as the American romances are adaptations of the traditional novelistic procedures to the American cultural conditions and new aesthetic aspirations. It is interesting to realize that though both *Moby Dick* and *The Bithedale Romance* begin as novels, they become romances. This drift from the novel form to a genuine romance is more discernible in the imagination of Cooper. Cooper's first work, *Precaution* was a novel of manners, somewhat in the style of Jane Austen. Then he wrote *The Spy* in which he followed Scott. Here, he put his characters in the borderline without the institutions and manners of society. He presented only a general picture of the society. Thus, he moved away from the novel form proper to a step towards the successful mythic qualities of the Leather-stocking tales. Thus, we see in his imagination, the main drift in American fiction towards the romances, away from the novelistic tradition. Thus, although Cooper gave an unmistakable American tone to romance, he continued to be, in many ways, a disciple of Scott.

Also, the modern Romance is the substitute for the ancient epic. Though the form is changed, the matter is very much the same. Even as it differs from the English novel, it appears closer to the epic and drama. The romance has loftier origin than the novel, as it approximates the poem. The standards of romance are those of the epic. It invests individuals with an absorbing interest. It requires the same unities of plan, of purpose and harmony of parts. It seeks for its adventures among the wild and wonderful. It grasps at the possible and placing a human agent in hitherto untried situations, it exercises its ingenuity in extricating him from them, while describing his feelings and his fortunes in the process.

American fiction has been notable for its poetic quality. It is the poetry of romance. Many American novels, according to Richard Chase, remind us of "epics, large and small". *Moby Dick*, *Huck Finn* and *As I Lay Dying* belong to this quality of writing. In any case, on the whole, American fiction has approximated the poetry of idyl and of melodrama more often than of an epic. As in the case of Cooper, when a writer calls his work a romance, it only means that he wishes to claim a certain amplitude, both in its fashion and material. The romance presents truth, under no restrictions, except according to the writer's choice of circumstances. According to Hawthorne, the American author has to choose "a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land," where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, as in the

ambience of Glenn's Falls in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. Romance is a kind of "border" fiction, where the field of action is the neutral territory between civilization and the wilderness, as Cooper's, *Leatherstocking Tales*. Or, as in Hawthorne and other later romancers, the field of action is conceived as a state of mind, the borderland of the human mind, where the actual and the imaginary intermingle. Romance like the novel, does not exist in actuality nor does it escape into the purely imaginary or fantastic. It is somewhere between the actual and fantastic, a combination of both in various forms and degrees. Also, the emotional intensity, in the form of the truth of the heart, is more generic or archetypal in the romance than in the novel. Though it maybe rendered less concretely, it still belongs to a time and a place. Unlike Hawthorne, who demonstrates enough talent to study the psychological behaviour of his characters to represent the particular demands of an American imagination of his times, Cooper is not a psychologist. He shows no psychological quality in describing the stoic inner life of Natty Bumppo. However, in any case, in the first generation American novelists of Brockden Brown and Cooper, the first steps in the adaptation of the English romance to the American condition began. Following these, there are two strains of romance in the American imagination. While the first strain consists of writers such as Hawthorne, Melville, Mark Twain and Faulkner, the second strain consists writers like John Eastern like, who are more like faithful imitators of Scott, than original romancers in their own right. Finally, what are the qualities of the American romance? Those qualities are: the penchant for the marvellous, the sensational and the legendary.

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## 2.5 WASHINGTON IRVING AND EDGAR ALLEN POE

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### 2.5.1 Washington Irving (1783-1859)

The first American to devote himself exclusively to a literary career in the 19th Century was Charles Brockden Brown, who was born in Philadelphia in 1771 and published six novels before his death in 1810. Taking the subject matter from contemporary America, he championed the ideals of freedom and social reform. His fiction showed the influence of the exotic aspects of the European Romanticism in the form of Gothic tales. He began a trend in portraying the dark and mysterious, which was later developed by Poe and continued to be one of the dominant characteristics of the American fiction to the present.

Washington Irving was the first American classical writer. Even in his own life time, his sketches found their way into the schools and into the libraries. He demonstrated initially his mastery of the form and temper of the 19<sup>th</sup> century essay. Byron, Coleridge and Scott were among his admirers. He wrote with his own authentic style, born of a temperament, taste and subtlety of mind, which were peculiarly his own. Hawthorne worshipped him. Irving was a poetic interpreter of legend, -local, European and universal.

The events of Irving's, life are characterised by a sort of casual approach. Born to a prosperous New York merchant and well-educated, he began reading for the law, but at nineteen he published in his brother's newspaper, "Jonathan Oldstyle", satires of New York life. His literary career seems to be the result of circumstances; the rapidly growing social and literary life of Manhattan; European fashions of writing; his own alert mind. Reading the writings of Burns, Campbell. Byron Scott and Emerson, Poe and Hawthorne - as they came from the press, the early nineteenth century romantics, in particular, Scott, "oriented his taste", as the clubs, periodicals and theatres and civilized little city directed his talents, towards satire, the essay, the drama and the short-story.

By the age of twenty-three, after a literary association with Hudson Valley, England, Holland, France, Italy, reading and studying what pleased him, he joined with his brother in producing the *Salmagundi* papers, which were Addisonian commentaria on

New York society and its frivolities. He then wrote *A History of New York by Diedrich Knicker Brocker* (1809), a rollocking burlesque of a current history of the early Dutch settlers and this became a classic of humour. The origin of this book resembles that of Fielding's, "Joseph Andrews" and Dickens's "Pickwick Papers". Assuming throughout the characters of Diedrich Knickerbocker, an eccentric, old bachelor who typifies the decaying Dutch families of New York, Irving mingles with many actual facts of colonial history. The fun of this book lies in frequent and imperceptible of the sense and non-sense. The temper of this work is freshly American. The style is rather like that of Goldsmith. His traditional eighteenth century style was meant both for England and America.

After the personal tragedy due to the death of his fiancée, Matilda Hoftman, and personal responsibility because of domestic responsibility, he wrote his most famous work, *The Sketch Book*. It appeared serially in 1819-1820. This contains his best known stories, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow". These collection of essays and short-stories written in a style like Goldsmith's. Its prose was hardly surpassed in the 19th Century England. This prose is of the balanced, cool and rhythmical sort. The story of Rip Van Winkle is a legend in various European forms. It combines in a peculiar manner, the fresh romantic feeling with traditional Augustan style. *Bracebridge Hall* followed in 1822. Then, he went to Germany in pursuit of an interest in German romanticism, when he wrote the *Tales of a Traveller* (1824) and other works. In these works, Irving excelled in the art of short-story. In collaboration with John Howard Payne, he wrote the social comedy called *Charles the Second; or The Merry Monarch*. From 1826 to 1829, he was in Spain on diplomatic business. His reading of the Spanish historical sources resulted in a number of important works: *A History of the life and voyage of Christopher Columbus* (1828), *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* (1829) and *Voyages and Discoveries of the companions of Columbus* (1831) and a famous volume of stories and sketches called *The Alhambra* (1832) and *The Legends of the Conquest of Spain*. After seventeen years abroad, he returned with a desire to portray his own country again and such Western adventures as *A Tour of the Prairies* (1835), *Astoria* (1836) and *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* are his other works. After refusing his nomination to Congress, or to become Van Buren's secretary of the navy, he wrote a good *Life of Oliver Goldsmith* (1840) and began the *Life of George Washington* (published 1855-1859), a standard work. From 1842 to 1845, he remodelled and revised his works, and the fifth and last volume of the latter appeared just before his death in 1859.

He was the first great prose stylist of American romanticism. He was urbane and worldly, yet humorous and gentle. His vast reading, following only the impulse of his own enthusiasms, resulted in a rich literary inheritance. He wrote for giving pleasure to a generation steeped in Puritanical didactic writings. He founded the extravagant American humour on which Mark Twain built up. He also started employing the urbane wit, which has survived in writers ranging from Holmes and Lowell to the *New Yorker* wits of the present century. In his *Sketch Books*, he wrote the first modern short-stories. He was among the first of the moderns to write good history and biography. He introduced the familiar essay to America. He restored the Gothic romances, which Poe infused with psychological intensity. The scope of the life and work was international and his well-known short-stories awakened an interest in the life of the American regions from the Hudson valley to the prairies of the West. His influence abroad as writer, visitor and diplomat was that of a gifted cultural ambassador. As thus, Washington Irving's achievement is multifaceted, we always remember him as the first true American writer of the 19th century to launch the growing gigantic edifice of the American imagination in letters.

### **2.5.2 Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849)**

*Edgar Allen Poe* (1809-1849) was born in Boston. His first five short stories, a part of the *Tales of the Folio Club*, was published by the *Philadelphia Saturday*. In 1833,

his first characteristic short-story combining pseudo-science and terror, won him prize. He settled down to his period of greatest accomplishment.

His works are directed towards universal human responses. He influenced the course of creative writing and criticism by emphasizing the art that appeals simultaneously to reason and to emotion by insisting that the work of art is not a fragment of the author's life nor an adjunct created in the cause of beauty. This creative act involves the concentration and unity together with the most scrupulous use of words. Poe took Coleridge as his inspiration in his search for a consistent theory of art. His literary symbolism took shape in France. His familiar legend is at variance with his actual personality. Finding himself in conflict with the prevailing spring of his age, he took refuge in the Byronic myth of the lonely and misunderstood artist. Indeed, his neurotic personality sometimes resembled that of his own fictional characters.

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## 2.6 LIFE AND WORKS OF JAMES F. COOPER

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As we have seen in the last two Units, a literary text is a "product" of the race, milieu and moment, we are also familiar with the universal truth that a writer's life, his ambience and his particular attitude to life and creativity, do have a living continuum with his productions. It is well known that a writer and his personality, in some or degree other, shapes his creativity. A text written to some degree or the other, is, implicitly, a life lived. Therefore, let us now know James Fennimore Cooper's life, and its relationship with his creative canon.

Born into a family of English Quakers on September 15, 1789, at Ostego Hill, the brick mansion in Cooperstown, named after his inventive and patriarchal father, William Cooper, James Fennimore Cooper's formative influence in shaping his imaginative locale, Glimmerglass and his paternal image constitute the ineradicable influence. His father, William Cooper invented the Cooperstown on the shores of Ostego Lake at the source of Susquehanna River. He had a shaping influence in the destiny of Cooperstown, as a generous Christian gentleman, a sensible politician and a Federalist judge. He was, above all, a considerate patriarch. Cooperstown, accessible by river and lake, as it was strategically located, was the new village through which the newly arriving European immigrants passed. There was a sense of national destiny in the air of the place, which became, in due course, a microcosm of the American frontier, at the end of the eighteenth century. This feeling of the frontier life on the shores of Ostego Lake, in central New York, which was still a frontier territory, then. Though the power of the Iroquois conspiracy was broken by then, the wilderness was still to be conquered and civilization yet to be established. This yearning for the frontier and "romance of the forests" in his Leatherstocking tales, which found its perennial inspiration for his creative imagination, in his place of birth and childhood ambience of Cooper's town. For, what was Ostego Lake, became immortalized in its ever blissful idyllic setting in the picturesque lake of Glimmerglass Lake in *The Deerslayer*.

After his education in the preparatory school, where he was taught classics, in particular, Vergil's, his studies at Yale (which he entered in 1813) was a disaster, to say the least, though he was admired and even praised "as a fine sparkling beautiful boy of alluring person and interesting manners". His stay there ended on a sad note, with the wasting of his time and ample energies in the campus pranks, making his father send the young Cooper into the nautical experience, which, subsequently, became the core of his dream, imagination and experience, both as an individual and creative writer. Thus, along with his love of the "romance of the forests" in his Ostego Lake ambience, now his life-long exposure (either really or in its continuous association in his dreams) this sea experience became yet another inspiration for his sea tales. However, his sea experiences, in real life, in spite of his abundant, irrepressible, passionate zeal did not have a profound run. As he started his first sea

encounter on the *Stirling*, when he was hardly seventeen, gave him a ring side view of the risks and all its attendant problems of adapting to unpredictable climate, and ever unreliable humanity around him in the ship. Though the sea was his first love and deep passion, as he wrote home back in enjoyable detail, his sea experiences, to fulfil his deep yearning for voyaging to exotic lands did not become a real life possibility, though it inspired his poetic ventures to immortalize his longings in his fiction, as his European travel books abound with long description of those sea journeys with a near perfection of their technical nautical detail. To this extent, undoubtedly, his intimate knowledge of sea is far more than in the case of Sir Walter Scott. In the case of Cooper, the supposedly "American Scott", sea had a fascination and near empathy, later on. Cooper's love of the water was, in a way, primordial, in that, where he lived, as he failed in realizing his dream of the sea life, he chose to love close to the water, so that he could hear the clash of the waves and enjoy the serene, fresh breeze.

After his failure at Yale and near tragic failure of his circumstances to make him his realize his passionate dream of the sea life, his career as a writer became not so much planned or a deeply felt aesthetic need, at the beginning. As he was without much of a substantive vocation (as there was not much need, with enough property inherited from his illustrious father and of his rich wife, Susan), he was reading some of the current English novels, in particular, those of Jane Austen. When he was reading some novels of Jane Austen, dealing with the sentimental side of life, he declared to his wife, in a fit of exasperation, that he would any way have written better; that was perhaps the fortuitous moment, when his own creative imagination was fired, with the supposed challenge of his wife to do better, if he could. Thus, a novelist was born and historically, if any, the first true, complete American novelist was born.

James Fennimore Cooper, after Washington Irving, assumed "an almost giant stature" in the early part of 19<sup>th</sup> century. He triumphed in his interpretation of romantic and realistic life on the frontiers and in the sea and in his attitude towards the development of democracy and of the meaning of America. He was a man of action, for whom the literary career as the pioneering American novelist was superficially an accident. Genius was "mainly an affair of energy" in him. He wrote passionately and with a clear purpose and mission. He wrote his convictions concerning his era and the new instruments of culture in pamphlet, history and novel. Though not properly a "literary" sport, according Spiller, et al., he was "Agamemnon at a desk". Yet, his genius left some thirty novels, several enduring volumes of social criticism and a few immortal characters like Natty Bumppo and Uncas. He is, of all his many-sided achievements, a social critic and a believer in the democratic functioning. He is "a golden story-teller, the creator of our Arabian nights of the frontier". After his unsuccessful novel *Precaution* (1820), modelled upon Jane Austen or Mrs. Opic, he dealt with three types of American subjects in his imagination. They are: The Revolution, The Frontier and The Sea. His creative canon beginning with *Precaution* in 1820 and ending in 1850 with *The Ways of the Hour* can be divided into three phases, at least chronologically. (1) the first period includes his venture into fiction in his thirty-first year and his sudden triumph in his historical novel of the revolution. *The Spy* and *Lionel Lincoln* (which is not much of a success) belong to this phase; (2) the second period includes his journey to Europe (1826-1833), beginning with *Prairie* in 1827 and ending with *The Deerslayer* (1841). This is Cooper's richest and most varied performance as during this period, his creative work includes his social criticism, his romances of Europe and three Leatherstocking tales; In the third period, which equates with the last decade of his life, he wrote on the familiar theme. However, to focus particularly on the history of writing of his Leatherstocking Tales, these five novels of this series namely, *The Pioneers*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Prairie*, *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* were written over a period of eighteen years and their chronology with reference to the prolonged life story of the Leatherstocking is at variance with the order of composition and publication. In any case, the three connate experiences of the

Revolution, the Frontier and the sea "crossed and recrossed" one another in these and other tales and through them came out "the fire of Cooper's criticism of America".

For Cooper, literature, apart from being intense romantic experience of rich fantasy and a sense of wonder and mystery, is also primarily a means for his convictions about America. His belief in the moral quality of liberty, his nationalism, his notion that native human character received its most valid self-expression in America and the relation of all these ideas to the natural world of the forest and sea form the core of his ideas in his imagination. Thus, we may discern in his writings America in the early stages of introspection and self-evaluation. His creative imagination reflects America's optimism and fatalism of the frontier, the growth of class-consciousness, the beginnings of imperialism, and the stubborn resistance of the class-consciousness. He hoped to resolve these elements into some kind of unity through his writings. In spite of the outright refusal of Mark Twain for his "literary offences", Cooper stands with Dumas and Scott as "one of the great romancers of all time". Thackeray paid rich tribute to his heroes;

Leatherstocking, Uncas, Haraheart, Tom Coffin are quite the equals of Scott's men; ... He ranks with Uncle Toby, Sir Roger de Coverley, Falstaff heroic figures, all – American or British, and the artist has deserved well of his country who devised them.

In this context, we should remember that Cooper cherished an unconscious allegiance to the traditions of English fiction. Though he was moved by the philosophical idea of Shakespeare or touched by Scott, he was more interested in "the power of the well told story". As Cooper, by reading and temperament, acquired a devotion to the important 19<sup>th</sup> century literary form, namely, the narrative, he drew his literary inspiration from the English novel. He admired the basic quality of the English novel, for its realistic action, characterization, luxurious description, comfortable narrative endings, and communication of social ideas by all these artistic processes. As his great contribution is the theme of the frontier, he adapted the English novel form for his own purpose of sometimes romanticising the reality, as in his *Leatherstocking Tales*.

#### His Literary Career:

Cooper, first unsuccessful novel, *Precaution* (1820), perhaps, modelled on the English fictional tradition of Jane Austen, deals with the complicated story of domestic manners. The central issue in this novel is the care parents should take to insure the proper marriage of their daughters. Here, Cooper clearly reveals his interest in the social themes and his insistence upon the application of the moral principle as a guide to action. As this is clearly the work of an intelligent, amateur writer, the critical reception was not all too encouraging. His second work *The Spy* (1822) firmly established his literary career. Beginning with *The Spy*, Cooper started using the material for the American scene, in his succeeding novels also. Here the physical environment defines the central conflict and sets the moral and ethical one that dominates the book. The neutral ground between the British and American outposts is a moral wasteland, where conflicting principles are at war and the only law is might. The positive value in the book is Harvey Birch, the double agent. As a spy, whose true motives must always be concealed, he shares the ambiguity that pervades the neutral ground, where he lives. He is superior to the other inhabitants as he seeks no personal gain. From the war he loses all his possessions to the greedy skinners. As the novel is a thrilling tale of adventure, it derives its truth from the dense reality of the natural setting, the relation of the characters to that setting and a physical action that also has a consistent moral significance. *The Pioneers* (1820), draws its fundamental meaning from the description of the society it portrays and the relation of that society to the American wilderness, that must be invaded and destroyed if civilization is to spread across the continent. Setting the scene at Ostego Lake in 1793-94, Cooper describes a society just past the frontier stage. The return of

the lost heir Oliver Effingham to claim the inheritance that he mistakenly believes Judge Temple has wrongfully appropriated is the theme of the novel. More important, however, in the book is the conflict between Judge Temple and Natty Bumppo, the Leatherstocking hero. This conflict arising from the realities of the physical environment poses a true moral problem for the judge; but it also suggests an important theme about the westward march of American civilization. Of his own freewill, the Leatherstocking leaves the settlement and disappears into the woods. He has gone "far towards the setting sun" ... the foremost in that band of pioneers who are opening the way for the march of the nation across the continent". But his flight merely begins the cycle anew. He, therefore, becomes inevitable heralds the civilization he most wants to avoid.

In *The Pilot* (1824) the physical environment is again of the utmost importance. It deals with the times of revolution and place is the coast of England, where two American men-of-war are cruising in preparation for a raid on the island. The plan is to capture hostages to insure good treatment of American prisoners. According to Spiller *et al.*, Cooper's sea novels have "more authenticity than those of the Frontier". Here, John Paul Jones, without a country becomes a tragic hero; he achieves "a Byronic ghost, a man with secret sorrows, darkened brow, mysterious devotions and almost comic mannerisms." *Lionel Lincoln* (1825) his next novel, criticized for its "pompous dullness" and preposterous melodrama", describes the situation against the background of Boston on the eve of Revolution. In *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Cooper's second of the five *Leatherstocking Tales*, acknowledged to be his masterpiece, we have not only a glimpse of the wilderness, but "we live there." *The Prairie* (1827), with the peace of Nature instilling our spirits and mind, tells us an adventurous tale. Here, we have Cooper's powerful conception of the immigrant family of Ishamel and Esther Bush and their sons. As in the previous books, the relation of man to Nature is fundamental to the tale, but the landscape is described as even more vast and sublime in many ways. This novel directly complements *The Last of the Mohicans* in its portrayal of the spirit of Nature and man's relation to it.

During this period, although Cooper wrote ten more novels, all those works except *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841) were not of particular interest for their artistic quality. About 1840, he reached the peak of his activity in his power of his craftsmanship. His last pair of *The Leatherstocking Tales*, *The Pathfinder* and *Deerslayer* (1841) complete Cooper's search and advocacy of the true American morals: social, economic and political issues the setting them against the spirit of frontier. If the frontier is the objective correlative of pure Christian values, in their essence, *The Pathfinder*, continuing the theme of purity and relevance of the wilderness to the American manners, focusses on the social problems. Though the same characters of Natty Bumppo (here he is the Pathfinder) and Chingchghoork reappear, this novel tells us more about American democracy. In a more powerful way, his *Deerslayer*, the last of the "romances of the forest", though the first in the chronology of the hero's life, contrasts the pristine purity of Nature's spirit with the corrupting mind of the European villains, Jom and Hurry Harry. Here, Hetty, Tom's daughter and *Deerslayer* reiterate the values of higher good, as done by Hawk-eye in *The Last of the Mohicans*. The purer self between the two is represented by *Deerslayer*, who is portrayed as the "embodied conscience for America". Like Natty Bumppo, he sees the moral values in the American landscape.

Thus, with *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* Cooper's work has made a full circle. *The Deerslayer* is the logical culmination of the Leatherstocking series. It once again affirms a set of values that were always forceful in his earlier tales, if only he applied these moral values in delineating the American manners of his times in his later works. Thus, fundamental to Cooper's work in all forms, is a moral view of the world and of men that has its social aspects. However, his moral value lies in relating Man to God, as revealed in the order of nature and then to his followers in an ordered society. To this extent, the moral tales of the forest and sea have a widespread social significance, as they establish the high standards for men to follow in their social

relations. Thus, though different in their art and approach to life, these writers of the early nineteenth century, namely Washington Irving, E.A.Poe and Cooper, set the tone of the ensuing American fiction.

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## 2.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, we have studied the literary ambience of Cooper's Leatherstocking tales. The nineteenth century literary mind took its origins from self-trust and expansion of the adolescent American nation of dreams and all-round enterprise. This boundless faith in self-reliance in individual's capacity for excellence and productivity established itself as optimism. This spirit of optimism became the main quality of the American Romance. The American novel, romantic in spirit, is different from the European novel, which describes the class structure. Though the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the first American novel, was hoisted by Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving became the truly first American classical writer. E.A.Poe and Fennimore Cooper are the other contributors to the unique American quality of novel, which is a creative union of the narrative and romantic qualities.

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## 2.8 QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss the background and qualities of Romanticism in America.
2. Trace the main qualities of the Romance in the American narrative form.
3. What are the differences between the English novel and the American novel form?
4. Study the literary background of Washington Irving, E.A.Poe and James Fennimore Cooper.

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## 2.9 SUGGESTED READING

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Sculley Bradley, ed. *The American Tradition in Literature*, NY: W.W.Norton & Company, 1956.

R.E.Spiller *et.al.*, *History of American Literature*.

Richard Chase *American Novel and Its Tradition*.

D.H.Lawrence *Studies in Classical American Literature*.

Arthur Hobson Quinn *American Fiction*

Wendell Barret *A Literary History of America*

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## UNIT 3 *THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS* : AN ANALYSIS

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Critical Approach to the Novel : The Initial Debate
- 3.2 The First Complete American Novel
- 3.3 Various Themes
- 3.4 Plot
- 3.5 Characterization
- 3.6 A Critique on the Red Indians
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Questions
- 3.9 Suggested Reading

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying the cultural, philosophical and religious conditions, which shaped the romantic imagination of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American novel, in the last two units and after discussing the characteristics of the American novel, as it differs from English novel of that period, we discuss the themes, plot and characterization of *The Last of The Mohicans*, in this Unit. We should realize that landscape instructs all the aspects of novel. In fact, landscape is the womb from which the novel originates. It defines and shapes the theme, plot and characterization. As it is gruesome and yet ultimately ends on a note of sobriety at the end of the novel, Uncas and the Hawk-eye signify the true basis of human love in universal terms. This is true import of the novel, not withstanding the unconcealed racial motifs', in some form or the other.

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### 3.1 CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE NOVEL : THE INITIAL DEBATE

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The form and interest in the critical reception and evaluation of any literary text is a responsive indication of the importance of the text in representing the mood and taste of the contemporary society. To this extent, as Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* has occupied a centre stage in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century American novel, signifying in itself the diverse social, cultural and philosophical and romantic principles of the adolescent America of the period, a review of the widespread critical debate of Cooper, the novelist, in general and *The Last of the Mohicans*, in particular, is not out of place, in our own appreciation of this valuable text, in the next part of this Unit.

The critical debate with regard to the reception of *The Last of the Mohicans* is wideranging. While critics like James Grossman (Cooper's official biographer), Alexander Cowie, Yvor Winters (in his *Defence of Reason*) and Van Wyck Brooks do not claim any particular aesthetic merit for this novel, except considering it as nothing more than "a mere adventure story", three important critics, D.H. Lawrence, Leslie Fiedler and Mark Twain have taken up this novel for serious study. Again, while Lawrence and Fiedler focussed on the intrinsic artistic qualities of the novel, Mark Twain is devastating in his outright refusal of the novel as any artistic piece. However, according to Daniel Peck, in his recent book, *New Essays on The Last of the Mohicans*, clearly, there are at least four approaches, in which the critical debate has taken place since the nineteenth century. They are: (1) with regard to Cooper's portrayal of the Red Indians; (2) for considering the narrative qualities of *The Last of*

*the Mohicans*; (3) for approaching the novel for its historical and cultural concerns, and (4) for comprehending the novel's artistic immensity through other approaches, such as through its pictorial qualities, formalist and feminist considerations.

First, Cooper's portrayal of the Red Indians in *The Last of the Mohicans* has drawn much critical attention. It has drawn extreme forms of response from the critics. While many critics questioned Cooper's authenticity and insights in the portrayal of the native Red Indians, some critics, however, have accepted the true saintliness and wisdom of the natives. A review in the May 1826 issue of *London Magazine* referred *The Last of the Mohicans* as "clearly by much the worst of Mr. Cooper's performances and drew attention to the improbabilities "of its action and characterization." W.H. Gardiner, while being sympathetic in his treatment of the novel, felt that Cooper presented "an altogether false and ideal view of the Indian character". He wondered if any "such civilized warriors like Uncas ever flourished" among the native Indians. William Bird and Francis Parkman merely dubbed this ideal portrayal of the Indians as being "superficially or falsely drawn." Notwithstanding these criticisms, the novel's popularity was unaffected, as it remained the most internationally acclaimed and widely translated of Cooper's works. Perhaps, the most uncompromising and violent attack of this novel came from Mark Twain in his famous essay, "Fennimore Cooper's Literary Offences" (*North American Review*, clxi, July, 1895).

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Mark Twain in his merciless lambasting of Cooper's art, identities, according to him, some defects in Cooper's craftsmanship at least in one of the five Leatherstocking tales, namely, *The Deerslayer*. He identifies at least eighteen rules of a romance, which Cooper violated. They include, most importantly, Cooper's inability in the organisation and accomplishment of the novel itself, in such matters as lively portrayal of characters and men in it, their conversations and action in the tale. The thoughts and activities of the characters, including that of Natty Bumppo are "crass stupidities." As the characters are drawn without any clarity, the readers do not have "any deep interest in the personages of tale and their fate". In addition to these "defects", in the handling of the plot and portrayal of characters, Mark Twain also notices defects concerning Cooper's use of language, and "good grammar". Cooper lacks "a simple and straight forward style".

Cooper's gift of invention lacks in accuracy and a sense of perfect detail. Without these "gifts of invention", he employs "eight cunning devices, tricks, artifices for his savages and Woodsman." As his inventions lacked rationality and accurate judgement, his "proudest creations suffer noticeably from the absence of the observer's protecting gift". His eye was "splendidly inaccurate." He seldom saw anything "correctly." Being not "a master in the construction of dialogue", his word-sense was "singularly dull."

Thus, Mark Twain, singularly rejecting Cooper's art in *The Deerslayer*, disclaims its greatness in any artistic manner. It is without "order system, sequence or result. It has "no lifelikeness, no thrill, no stir, no seeming of reality". As its "characters are confusedly drawn" and their humour is pathetic and "pathos is funny" and "their English a crime against the language", according to Mark Twain, Cooper's *Deerslayer* is not "a work of art in any sense. It is "destitute of every detail".

Apart from Mark Twain's attack, Cooper's art and his *The Last of the Mohicans* did have notable defenders in the nineteenth century itself. William Gilmore Simms, who wrote *The Yemassee* (which may be considered as counterpart to *The Last of the Mohicans*) praised Cooper for his [inimitable] details of Indian art and resource". Balzac in 1840 ranked this novel as having a "unique and rightful claim to fame." Conrad in his *Notes on Life and Letters* in 1921, wrote that for Cooper "nature was an essential part of his existence. He could hear its voice, he could understand its silence, and he could interpret both for us ... with a poetical conception." According

to Daniel Webster, Cooper "transmits original American character from generation to the generation, which succeed him (*Twentieth Century Views*).

## An Analysis

However, the real analytical study of this novel has to await the early twentieth century. W.C. Brownell, while defending Cooper in his portrayal of the Indians, says that the Indian characters, without being portrayed as romanticized or racial types, "are carefully studied and as successfully portrayed as his white ones", each character with its own separate identity and individuality. However, the critical opinion, in general, in the case of other critics seem to believe that Cooper's Indian portrayals appear either as mere stereotypes or represent Cooper's mere sentimental love for them to justify the white man's dispossession of them. Further, some critics discovered a genuinely felt sense of loss and even a deep personal identification in Cooper with the Indian dispossession, when he himself was dispossessed of vast lands in the central New York. According to Daniel Peck, as no white American writer of the early or mid-nineteenth century was free of racial prejudice, towards the Indians, we need to study Cooper's works closely.

Second, the critical opinion towards his description of *The Last of the Mohicans* in his preface as a narrative with "a fidelity to fact and an efficacy of plot" has been in favour of considering this novel as a true narrative of fiction. An early review in March 1826 noted that the novel carries us through "agonizing doubt, surprise, danger and sudden deliverance." W.H. Gardiner praised the novel for "the intense and breathless interest of the story". Thomas R. Lounsbury, Cooper's nineteenth century biographer said that in this novel, our "interest not only never halts but also never sinks". Grossman, another Cooper biographer considers this novel as "a pure adventure story." D.H. Lawrence, one of the influential critics of Cooper, in his brilliant essay, believes that these Tales "go backwards from old age to the golden youth". This is the true myth founded as a "new relationship" promising "a new society". This new relationship between Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook is deeper as these two figures are abiding, representing "the inception of a new humanity". All other critical responses of Cooper in the 1950's and 1960's emerged from the study of the myth and symbol in his works. For R.W.B. Lewis (in his *American Adam*) the Leatherstocking is an archetypal American "hero in space", born out of the mythic possibilities of the American landscape. For Henry Nash Smith, the Tales dramatize "the problem of social order", while for Roy Harvey Pearce and Edwin Fussell, they exemplified American attitudes towards the frontier. However, the most influential of mythic interpretations, directly derived from Lawrence, is Leslie Fiedler's idea of a "secret theme" of miscegenation between Cora and Uncas. In place of this union of Uncas and Cora, the only alternative for Cooper, according to Fiedler, is to promote love between the Leatherstocking and Chingachgook. However, many critics in the 1960's, like George Dekker, challenging Fiedler's formulation held the view that the theme of miscegenation is hardly a secret theme. For him, Cooper's characters, like Scott's always represent national, regional and social classes.

Since 1970's and 1980's, Cooper criticism was characterized by probes into the writer's, interior landscape, by studying his historical and cultural concerns from the earlier historical treatments by V.L. Parrington and R.E. Spiller in the 1920's and 1930's. William Kelly sees in the tales, Cooper's struggle to reconcile American adamism and an opposing cultural myth of historical entailment. For him, the Fort William Henry is nexus of the meaning. Terence Williams recognized the centrality of history as a theme in the novel. Though Cooper's novels have not often been analyzed from a feminist perspective, according to Annette Kolodny, *The Last of the Mohicans* betrays Cooper's realization that he could neither accept "the guilt of the violation of the female landscape nor free Natty of that guilt." Of the other studies, James Beard's study of the importance of scenic effects in *The Last of the Mohicans* and Donald Ringe's treatment of the pictorialism of Bryant, Irving and Cooper are significant. The most important studies of the 1930's by Spiller and Dorothy Waples focussed on the novel's social and political meanings. Yvor Winters's formalist criticism recognized how well crafted are some of Cooper's lesser known works. In

the post-second war period, a number of critics like Donald Darnell identified the novel's formula by studying his double-journey structure. Minchael D. Butler examined the relation of the historical process to the novel's narrative structure. Thus, according to Daniel Peck, "no longer is it possible to regard this book simply as a well made adventure story." Undoubtedly, it has some more rewarding and evocative qualities than this. According to R.E. Spiller, Cooper, "the son of a pioneer himself became the builder and critic of civilizations."

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### 3.2 THE FIRST COMPLETE AMERICAN NOVEL

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However, in any case, his literary career, as the true pioneering American novelist is fully established, when he published *The Spy* (1821), notwithstanding the earlier attempts by Hugh Henny Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*, written in six parts between 1792 and 1815. Following the European models of Cervantes and Fielding and Smollette, by employing the picaresque technique, he deals with the lives of Captain Farrago, bachelor, spectator of life and Teague O'Regan, his illiterate servant. Unfortunately, this book had relatively little appeal, perhaps, because of its lack of identity with the time and place at that time.

Much earlier to this attempt by Brackenridge, Charles Broken-Brown, used American settings for his works, as *Edgar Huntly* can be said as the best pre-cooperian novel. However for historical reasons. William Hill Brown's novel *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) in the sentimental mould of Richardson, Susanna Rawson's *Charolette Temple* (1794), and Hanna Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) are more or less, initial though incomplete and unsuccessful forays in the art of novel writing in America, thus establishing Cooper's *Spy* in 1821 as the first complete, American novel, complete in all respects of art and theme, native meaning and identity. According to the *North American Review*, Cooper's fiction is "of the highest order of romantic interest". According to W.H. Gardiner the reviewer, Cooper had "laid the foundations of American romance". Thus, as Cooper's early novel is identified as a romance, with the qualities of mystery, picturesque setting and brilliant, pageantry, he had come to be recognized as "the American Scott", thus making the American novels most popular among reading public at home at that time, replacing the works of the current English novelists. Thus, Cooper's three phases of fictional imagination, namely, his nautical novels, romances of the forest and the European works constitute the core of his creative canon.

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### 3.3 VARIOUS THEMES

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*The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) is one of the five Leatherstocking tales. The other novels in this group are, *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841). These five novels which form the core of Cooper's imagination, won the rich confidence of the writer, when he proclaimed that "these romances would out live himself". Not only have these "romances of the forest" outlived him, they have, in general, become the focus of the American myth of progress and development in its early stages of development. By tempering the priceless value of purposeful adventure and resourceful enterprise with the qualities of humanism – in some form - Christian or not, the Natty Bumppo – in this novel he is called, the Hawk-eye is a veritable mixture of 19<sup>th</sup> century values of compassion and fellow feeling.

*The Last of the Mohicans* is a poem of nature, signifying moral wisdom and human values to us. Thematically, the narrative is about Natty Bumppo, "The Hawk-eye",

the scout, the Kill-Deer and the culmination of his abundant love for Uncas, the Last Mohican. He tells Uncas, in his final moments of departure into the wilderness thus:

"The gifts of colours may be different, but God has so placed us as to journey in the same path. I have no kin, and I may also say, like you, no people. He was your son, and a red skin by nature; and it may be that your blood was nearer – but if ever I forget the lad who has so often fought at my side in war, and slept at my side in peace, may He who made us all, whatever may be our color or our gifts may forget me! The boy has left us for a time; but, Sagamore, you are not alone." (p.415)

In a revealing poetic image, Cooper concludes the novel thus, bringing home the triumph of humanism as the highest achievement of the novel:

Chingachgook grasped the hand [of the Hawk-eye] that, in the warmth of feeling, the scout had stretched across the fresh earth, and in that attitude of friendship these two sturdy and intrepid woodsmen bowed their heads together, while scalding tears fell to their feet, watering the grave of Uncas like drops of falling rain. (p.415).

If the narrative meaning lies in these universal symbols of mind, drawn in epic proportions in a more particular context, to a developing nation, that will be made to resolve its racial dilemmas, this narrative resolves such a racial issue, in the manner of harmony of minds, without bitterness or animosity. Though in the process, Cooper does not seem to be idealizing the non-existent "noble savage" image of the scout, as he seems to be suggesting, according to R.E.Spiller, "a complete acceptance of Protestant ethical traditions." However, for D.H.Lawrence, Natty's union of minds with Chingachgook is Cooper's "wish-fulfilment". In a way, for Cooper, Natty Bumppo was his "inner most to be". The perpetual brother theme of the Leatherstocking tales is "a sheer myth". The Red man and the White man are not blood-brothers. The white man, betraying his own race, ultimately, is not a true companion to the Indian. As it is not true, it evades actuality. In his dream, even as Cooper dreamt of the union of minds of the Indians and the Whites, as symbolic of the maturing America, there is an unequal union, leading to the ultimate dispossession of the latter.

Thus, all the other narrative purposes are related to this union of mind, symbolic or romantic. It means that, other issues such as race, the question of the ownership of territory, the romantic love across races between Cora and Uncas, the cruelty and massacre at the Fort Williams are subsumed within this essential theme of the narrative.

Magua, "the Prince of Darkness" and Uncas, the bright son of the Delawares articulates the theme of their tragic dispossession. According to Magua:

"The spirit that made men colored them differently . . . some he made with faces paler than the ermine of the forests; and these he ordered to be traders: dogs to their women, and wolves to the slaves. . . . With his tongue, [the whiteman] stops the ears of the Indians. . . . his cunning tells him how to get together the goods of the earth; . . . God gave him enough, and yet he wants all, such are the pale-faces."

and

"Tis a long and melancholy tradition, and one I little like to think of; for it is not to be denied that the evil has been mainly done with white skins. But it has ended in turning the tomahawk of brother against brother, and brought the Mingo and the Delaware to travel in, in the same path (p.265).

Uncas appears to be more patriotic and forthright in his passionate commitment to the welfare of the Indians. He symbolizes the true spirit of the Indians. Tamenund, says thus: "[Uncas] is to fill my place at the council of fire. Uncas, the child of Uncas, is found! Let the eyes of a dying eagle gaze on the rising sun." (p.366).

Perhaps, the most gruesome massacre is described by Cooper in all its gory details. The massacre of the English soldiers and the Indians by the French men, under the full glare and mute acquiescence of Monteclam is beyond words. At least, three hundred people were massacred, of which the most heinous crime was the massacre of a mother with her small little child. This scene, reverberating with cries of horror, was triggered off by the betrayal of an English General Webb, who surreptitiously ordered for the surrender of the English soldiers, without the knowledge of Hayward. This was "betrayal" of the "civilized" whiteman. According to William P. Kelley this massacre was "the extension of the European past and the fullest expression of the barbarity" of the colonial period. This moral sin without retribution in the mind of Munro was heightened even to greater levels by savagery of unimaginable proportions by the French men. This barbarism of the "civilized" Europeans certainly outmatched the savagery of the primitive Indians, in every sense of the word.

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### 3.4 PLOT

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Structurally, the narrative plot gains in its poetic, moral, dramatic (and even melodramatic) intensity in two parts. Historically, it recreates a particular moment in the European domination of the colonies. As the French and Indian forces under Monteclam press southward from Canada into the English colony of New York in 1757, General Webb despatched 1,500 British reinforcements from Fort Edward near Glens Falls, to nearby Fort William Henry, at the southern tip of Lake George. However, Cooper's purpose is not at all strictly "historical", in a chronological sense, but, as explained by Terence Martin (in his "From the Ruins of History : The Last of the Mohicans" in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (Spring 1969), Cooper "recognized the importance of ruins of history, crumbling into legend". For "the ruins of history are the matrix of legend and romance". They appeal "to the imagination through the mist of years, replete with wonder and nostalgia." Such is the historical or a historical matrix out of which the silken threads of the narrative plot are woven into wonderful pageantry of colourful action. It is an unbelievable world, though yet reliable in its fundamental historicity. Structurally, from the beginning to the middle of the journey is the first part; the second part of the journey consists of all the vital and dramatic events, after the reunion of Hawk-eye, and his two accomplices, Alice and Cora with Hawk-eye and Chingachgook and his ever lovable son, Uncas. There is a qualitative difference in this mode of narration and rousing the reader's interest in the second part. If the first part is most elaborately descriptive and prepares the ground for the ensuing (somewhat) rapid action in the second part, the second part, slowly rising its tempo in the journey of Hawk-eye and his companions and reaching its crescendo in the massacre at Fort Williams, consummates itself on a note of sobriety and calmness. Thus, there is a steady rise, crescendo of unimaginable horror and fall leading to intense spiritual moments. The novel ends on a note of pregnant quietness.

In the first part of the journey, beginning with the description of the union of two parties in the journey – both separated racially and in their attitudes to life – a group of Whites, consisting of Hayward, Alice and Cora and a group of Indians, consisting of Chingachgook and Uncas, and also Hawk-eye in Chapter III is rendered by Cooper in these words:

While one of these loiterers showed the red skin and wild counterments of a native of the woods, the other exhibited, through the mask of his rude and nearly savage equipments, the brighter through sunburnt and long-faded complexion of one who might claim descent from a European parentage. (p.24)

Innocent and ever lovable David, the singer, symbolizing the Christian values provides the beautiful gracious moments of joy through his song all along the journey, in particular, after the massacre at the Fort Williams. As these two groups of characters, drawn against the vast landscape try to know each other, in suspicion and innocence and fear and wonder. Landscape shapes their moods and attitudes. Nature implicitly "instructs" them. To that extent, landscape itself acts as an invisible universal character, signifying the values of purity and honesty. It is not only vast but also pure and evoking feelings of piety. Glenn's Falls, from where journey starts, described in its momentous detail, in the words of Hawk-eye is drawn with a visual particularity:

"You can easily see the cunning of the place – the rock is black lime stone, which everybody knows is soft; it makes no uncomfortable pillow, . . . the fall was once a few yards below us, and . . . as handsome a sheet of water as any along the Hudson." (p.55)

The journey of these two groups of people continues unmixed without any sort of emotional union till the French camp, which under the leadership of Monteclem, seizes the Fort William. This occurs in the novel in Chapter XIV. In the second part, the narrative action moves with greater alacrity and quickness of feelings, interspersed by the acts of savagery and moments of insecurity till the climax is reached with the massacre at Fort Williams. This massacre followed by dramatic events of the loss and recovery of Alice and the tragic death of Cora, unmatched for its sentimental love in the mind of Uncas and the villainous plot of Magua, the Heron (the Prince of Darkness) as part of his vengeance against the whites – all create images of high drama of splashing emotions. It is all along action and unremitting melodrama filled with suspense, breath-taking ordeals, and fears and wonders that crowd the action in the second part of the plot. Being mostly in the manner of a romantic tale, sheer fictional action at the physical and geographical level (in the form of landscape) crowds the novel.

However, in the concluding part of the novel, after the gory tale of the massacre of nearly three hundred people, including helpless women and children, two events evoke in us feelings of grim tragedy: first is the most tragic, yet pitiable death of Cora, the mulatto girl; second is the heroic death of Uncas himself in trying to save her. Verily, Cooper takes the action at this moment to the heights of a classical tragedy. With the death of Uncas, the last Mohican, his race is decimated. It is a fatal moment of universal significance. Finally, with Magua's death in a melodramatic manner, the narrative action comes to an end. However, the grand union of minds across races and prejudices is the most celebrated and extraordinary and highly romanticized narrative moment. Ultimately, when we complete reading the novel, we may remember it not for its acts of endemic savagery, but, for its acts of compassion, fraternity and democracy of ideas. Finally, love as an experience triumphs over savagery. Even the supposed savages empathize with the suffering humanity around, by the illuminating Christian ideas of Hawk-eye, a scout without a cross. If the highest sort of true union of minds is between Uncas and Hawk-eye, there is, nevertheless, at various levels, empathy and compassion in the minds of Munro, Hayward, Chingachgook and Tamenund. Even Alice is not without Christian values of companion for the savages, notwithstanding the death of her soul mate, Cora, her own sister in their hands. Munro's words of benediction reinforce the theme of universal union of minds as in the case of Uncas and Hawk-eye, when he proclaims thus:

Tell them that the being we all worship, under different names, will be mindful of their charity; and that the time shall not be distant when we may assemble around his throne without distinction of sex, or rank, or color." (p.412).

As the narrative action reaches its culmination from the merely descriptive detail in the first part to its heightened and ennobled moment of Christian in the second part everywhere there is a fellow feeling. Even Chingachgook's pathetic loneliness on the death of his dearest son Uncas is mitigated by Hawk-eye's words of emotional communion:

"He who made us all, whatever may be our color or gifts, forget me! The boy has left us for a time; but, Sagamore, you are not alone." (p.415)

Cooper himself takes the narrative to a nobler level, with the triumph of humanism over senseless savagery and racial 'motif' in these words:

... the tie which, through their common calamity, had united the feelings of these simple dwellers in the woods with the strangers who had thus transiently visited them, was not so easily broken. Years passed before the traditionary tale of the white maiden, and of the young warrior of the Mohicans, leaved to beguile the long nights and tedious marches, or to animate their youthful and brave with a desire for vengeance (p.413).

This is a virtual epitaph for the love and demise of Cora and Uncas. According to Lakshmi Mani, "Cooper places in sharp contrast the nightmare reality of the wilderness and feam . . . of universal love, peace and harmony." Though historically the novel may dramatize the end of the Mohicans, it also signifies the harsh reality of the dispossession for the Indians by the Europeans of the "neutral ground", as expressed by Tamenund in the last words of the novel:

"The palefaces are the masters of the earth, and the time of the Red Man has not yet come again. In the morning I saw the sons of Unamis happy and strong; yet, before the night has come, have I lived to see the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans." (p.415)

Thus, plot here progresses from the past into future, in a unilateral manner, as in conventional nineteenth century novel. Being mostly a romance, where even actual history is romanticized, the chronological significance of time is of minimal value; space is also stretched most elastic proportions. For, though it is supposedly meant to describe a few miles of journey between Glenn's Falls and Fort William, the sheer force of the vast immensity of nature, distorts the actual geographical space to create in our minds images of endless space. To this extent, Time and Space by a romantic distortion of its fact and detail, create gigantic images and experiences of fleeting Time and Space.

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### 3.5 CHARACTERISATION

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Thus, in a world of extraordinary cataclysms and events of the frontier of unimaginable proportions and where action predominates characterization, the novel may not be demonstrating the qualities of deft portrayal of human nature. The characters may be lacking in their complexity and subtlety of perception of human nature, because of its qualities as a romance. However, for Cooper, according to Bewley, "an action is the intensified motion of life in which the spiritual and moral faculties of men are engaged."

Of the characters, who are only eked out against the realms of the frontier and the historical war between the French and the English, for the "neutral ground", Uncas and Natty Bumppo carry the universality of purpose. They truly symbolise the virtues and nobler meanings of life for all times and in all places. Though they are not Christians by practice, their "values" carry the authentic stamp of the true Christian judgement and mind. If Uncas' morality and ethical responsibility towards his Mohican race carry with them the pagan values of fair play, and filial responsibility, the scout without a cross, celebrates the true Christian values in the medium and rhythms of the extant Nature. Though not glorified as a "noble savage", his actions are governed by practical considerations. He is shrewd, observant and above all, truly humanistic in his commitment to the larger good of the universe.

Uncas is the last Mohican of the race. He is glorified and romanticised though not a fully idealised character. As one of the three participants, who guide Heyward, Alice and Cora to Fort William along with the ever dependable Natty, and his dear and caring father, Chingachgook, he appears to be not a major player in the first part of the novel. However, in the second part, his role becomes even more central, in particular, after the French seige of the fort of William Henry. He gradually unfolds his character as a natural foil to Magua, the Heron. The contrast between him and Magua is, indeed, quite stark.

His physical, moral and intellectual prowess unfolds itself in the last part of the novel. According to Hawk-eye, he will be "an honour to his people". His heroism is gradually unleashed on his foes, the Hurons, after they take away Cora and Alice. There is a steadiness of heroism in him:

Uncas stood still, looking his enemy in the eye with features that seemed superior to emotion. Marble could not be colder, calmer or steadier than the countenance he put upon this sudden and vindictive attack (p.295).

He has "erect, agile and faultless person" (p.363). There is a steadiness of purpose in his thought and action:

Through out the whole of these trying moments, Uncas had alone preserved his serenity. He looked on the preparations with a steady eye, and when the tormenters came to seize him, he met them with a firm and upright attitude (p.365).

He is logical, too. He explains to the Tamenund, the sage, the logic of the superiority of his race:

"... my race upholds the earth! Your feeble tribe stands on my shell! What fire that a Delaware can light would burn the child of my fathers, ... the blood that came from such a stock would smother your flames! My race is the grandfather of nations!" (p.366).

His commitment to the pride of his race is ennobling.

"Once we slept where we could hear the salt lake speak in its anger. Then we were rulers and Sagamores over the land. But when a paleface was seen on every brook, we followed the deer back to the river of our nation. the Delawares were gone. Few warriors of them all stayed to drink of the stream they loved ... Our eyes are on the rising and not toward the setting sun" (p.368).

Uncas is frequently exempt from much of the violence and ferocity of the novel. A suave, young man, more "civilized" than his fellow Indians, he is, perhaps, modelled seeking the values of sobriety of Heyward. He displays his "instinctive delicacy" in assisting the Female characters. The sight of Cora and Alice in each other's arms

moves Hayward to tears. Uncas "stood fresh, a calm and apparently an unmoved looker-on." He was "becoming with a sympathy that elevated him far above the (rest) and advanced him probably centuries before the practices of his nation (pp. 114-15). Even so, Uncas never lacks in his fierce some courage and thirst for battle. It is true that in the forest, he insistently displays his keen perception than his father or Natty Bumppo. In his athleticism of the body with a perfect synchronising of his eye and his hand – without many words – but all described in a quiet, heroic, methodical fashion – Cooper is almost idealizing a true warrior. He is a "hungry lion" and through the air descends "in a ball on the chest of the enemy and knocks him headlong and prostrate." In the ruins of Fort William Henry, when Huran shoots at Chingachgook from the dark, Uncas conquers the assassin and returns to the campfire with a fresh scalp at his belt. As he is attracted to Cora, whom he admires silently, courteously and unmistakably, he takes extreme risks on her account and finally gallantly perishes, in rescuing her from Magua, the Prince of Darkness. As the dramatisation of the funeral of Uncas takes the novel to glorified heights of sacrifice and enabled virtue this can be compared to "the funeral of Hector in the Iliad". His death is described in heroic terms. Uncas "appeared, arrayed in the most gorgeous ornaments that the wealth of the tribe could furnish. Rich plumes nodded above his head, wampum, forgets, bracelets, and medals adorned his person in profusion . . . (p.404).

A girl calls him "the panther of his tribe". She wants his mother to be told in the world of spirits that "the Delaware girls had shed tears above the grave of her child and had called her blessed." The maids pronounced him "noble, manly, generous all that became a warrior and all that a maid might love." For a warrior, Uncas has been like "that of the sun in the trees". His feet were like the wings of the eagle" and "his arm heavier than falling branches from the pine" and his "voice like the Manitto when he speaks in the clouds".

He is generous in his attitude to Hawk-eye. He is a typical Indian, with "a quick eye and a good cover". His love for Cora is unexpressed.

If Uncas is a glorified character, almost without any imperfection, Hawk-eye becomes his spiritual template. As between themselves these two characters subsume the ultimate message of humanism, the scout is a variously a mythicised, romanticized protagonist in the narrative in his own right. Also, according to William P. Kelley, by unifying the mind and temperament of Natty, and Chingachgook, Uncas' dear father, Cooper affirms "America's organic relationship with Europe. Their kinship of a Christian and savage perspective, defines "an intermediate state of cultural development, with its roots in European colonization." Their union signifies America's "prerevolutionary era of the national past."

Of the other characters, who are mostly drawn in their outline as mere functional types, Hayward and Munro move us by their immense politeness and commitment to any serious purpose of life. Major Hayward starts his journey to Fort William along with Alice and Cora. Though he is not drawn with any amount of far-fetched heroism (as Uncas), he, nevertheless, sufficiently demonstrates the quality of gentlemanliness and fair play. Though he may not so much play any precipitate role, in the battle at the end of the novel, he is an able companion to Alice and Cora and a good accomplice to Natty Bumppo.

The three major racial relationships, envisaged by Cooper in *The Last of the Mohicans*, are those represented by Cora and Uncas, Alice and Major Heyward and the Natto Bump and Chingachgook. They also represent broad national and historical perspectives. Cora and Uncas are both adaptable people as they symbolize the best in their respective civilizations. Cora's ability to confront the hardships and dangers of the aboriginal North America is frequently stressed. In a similar way, Uncas' freedom from the savages of his race is also equally emphasized. Though their marriage would have meant a true union of minds of the old and New World, in a

way, leading to a sort of the prophetic racial harmony it is not realized. According to Leslie Fiedler (in his celebrated essay), "miscegenation" is the secret theme of *The Last of the Mohicans*, as it is the theme of national or hemispheric significance. Fiedler argues that, though Cooper's contemporaries urged him to let Cora and Uncas be joined in marriage, his horror of miscegenation led him "to forbid even the not-quite white (that is mulatto Cora) offspring of one unnatural marriage to enter into another alliance that crossed race lines". If Cora is sensible and gifted with some level of resourcefulness, Alice is utterly helpless in the wilderness. Luckily for her, Major Hewyard plays his protective role.

In another way, according to Nina Baym (in *The Last of the Mohicans* ed. Daniel Deck), Heywood's attachment to Alice, but not to Cora is because of her black blood and Magus' love for Cora - is based upon deep-rooted racial concern in Cooper, thus leaving no scope for miscegenation. All along, it is true that Heyward - Munro arrangement of love - and marriage (with a momentary, though unimpressive chivalry from Heyward) done with great anxiety, perhaps, has unconcealed racial interest, to the extent, the coarseness of life and horrible death of Cora and near war situation created for her love between Uncas and Magua - with everybody except Natty Bumppo are mere observers - revivifies the racial 'motif' in the novel. It is a different matter that, Alice is merely "made up" as a lovable woman, as she is artless, thoughtless, child-like and without ingenuity. D.H. Lawrence also supports this view of Cooper is distinterest in "the blood-mixing of two races, white and red" and hence "he kills them off".

#### Natto's Character:

Natty Bumppo accepts the idealism of the Declaration of Independence, which says, "all men are created equal". He stands for universal brotherhood, an aristocracy of personal merit, and skill, naturally pretty. His character perhaps is "the clearest statement in literature of the archetypal American experience". As according to R.W.B. Lewis, Cooper, "most illuminating clashes and insights occur on the margins of his plots", Cooper touched a chord of imaginative energy far more compelling than that can be invested in his plot. Even as "the avalanche of adventures" occur in the narrative, Natty Bumppo is a knowledgeable, yet unemotional observer of all those events. Read in the chronology of his life, all these five tales record the loss of the ideal in the actual and more or less "they reaffirm the great American myth". Speaking of the relationship of Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, Leslie Fiedler tells us that, "these 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." (from his *Love and Death in the American Novel*, pp.192-196).

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### 3.5 A CRITIQUE ON THE RED INDIANS

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Cooper collected material for his portrayal of the Delwaraes, from *An Introduction of the History, Manners, and customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States* published in 1819 by the Reverend John Heckewelder, a Moravian missionary who for years had lived and worked among these people. Mohicans, Mohawks, Delawaras, Onondagas, Hurons, Sioux, Pawnees, Wyanadotties, Narragansetts, Wampanoags and Potawatamies are among the entries on Cooper's roster of tribes, but they are, in many cases, little more than names. As the story was told to Cooper in the lodges of the Sachems, the Delawares and Iroquois had once fought each other to a state of enmity. Unable to conquer their opponents by force, the Mingoes resorted to trickery. They somehow persuaded the unsuspecting Delawares to accept Iroquois protection, abandoning military pursuits to become a nation of mediators. Since only a few would, he needed as mediators, the bulk of the Delawares were to pass their time in peaceful occupations, hunting

and tilling the soil. Thus, as a majority of the Delawares were disarmed, the Iroquois encouraged neighbouring tribes to attack the defenceless Delawares until their members were decimated and their power greatly reduced. Awakened to their helpless predicament too late to save their race, many isolated warriors involved themselves in hit-and-run guerilla attacks. Thus, doomed inevitably to their fate, the heroic Delawares calmly demonstrated their nobility in the moral victories in that unequal battles with his enemies. This is the piece of folklore, which provided Cooper the legend for describing the tragic myth of the frontier.

Though Cooper's portrayal of Red Indians, (one of the approaches to the novel) has drawn wide-spread critical attention, mostly for racial reasons, in this novel, as for example, when Leslie Fiedler believes that, "the Indian represents to Cooper whatever in the American psyche has been starved to death, whatever genteel Anglo-Saxon has most ferociously repressed, . . . and the Indian stands . . . for a people disposed in the name of a God they do not know . . . (*Ibid.*, pp.192-96). Cooper draws them in broad outline. Except Uncas, Chingachgook, and Magua, all the other natives are drawn with a minimum of detail on types, either "good" or bad character. More than what do, in the novel, along with their umbilical cord with Mother Earth, they affect our experience of the novel, by their ways of living, their "civilized" governance (without betrayal at any level) and their own "social" norms. Their primitivism has its own logic and dispossessing them and depriving them of Nature's gifts is the most painful disorder, which this novel dramatizes.

Of all the Indians, we come across at least in our passing encounters, Magua is realized in some substantive detail and with enough narrative purpose. In a way, in a world, where nature appears to subdue everybody into humility and noble behaviour, only Magua stands out as an irredeemable symbol of evil. He is a conventional villain, with cruelty, cunning and with an ability for empty political rhetoric. His only justification for abducting Cora and creating so much savagery is that, he ants to take revenge against the insult of the whiteman. Whether this has a racial justification is doubtful. For, he is a renegade, thrown out by his own people. He is base and cowardly He joins the British forces to fight against his own tribe. Betrayal is his main trait. As the novel progresses, his capacity for treachery and evil increases. His desire for Cora keeps him in direct competition with Uncas. Attracted by her dark beauty, aware too that she is contemptuous of him, he is motivated to posses her primarily by his desire for revenge against Major Munro. His death, inconsequential as it is described without any grandeur on in the case of Uncas. There are not many words of sympathy for his plight as a renegade or even for his death.

In his portrayal of the Indians, Cooper has one purpose: that is, while he romanticises their "noble savage" to demonstrate his tolerant humanity, he nevertheless, employs them to present moral and social values, glorious or otherwise. They represent some of the ideal values of life. A "social bond" holds them together, with such community values as absolute and unenforced loyalty, without internecine conflict and universally unifying traditions and rituals they lived happily till they were dispossessed. Cooper's great Indian heroes are great because of their spirit of a whole community. Their expression of a feeling of wrong doing is the utterance of the tragedy of a whole nation. Chingachgook's relationship with Natty is outside the Indian tribal past, yet it bridges them, as according to Lawrence, Cooper dreamt of "the new nucleus of a new society, the clue to a new world-epoch" in their relationship, which leads to a great release into a new world, a new moral, a new landscape". This is the moral importance of their portrayal in this novel.

Thus, *The Last of The Mohicans* is a complex, rich poetic experience. Its dramatic intensity is unmatched. The entire narrative is painted in the medium of the frontier. Here, Cooper's frontier is mythicized as a legend and a historical force. In a romance, where action supercedes characterization, Uncas and Natty Bumppo

become allegorical symbols of purity and holiness of life. To this extent, the novel has three strains, lyrical, allegorical and dramatic. What is the ultimate meaning of this poem of nature? Its message is triumph of humanism with a near saintliness of perfection. Nature and Man become one and the same. It is a religion of faith. Its goal is moral wisdom with the noblest values of compassion and fellow feeling. Historically, it may signify the tragic dispossession of the Indians, as also expose the hypocrisy of the superiority of the European civilization by its massacre. But, aesthetically and morally, the novel is a glorious triumph of saintliness of Uncas and Hawk-eye, representing two races. Ultimately, Nature triumphs, where Man also elevates his consciousness to diviner heights. This is the message of the novel.

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### 3.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, we have discussed the themes, plot and characterization in *The Last of the Mohicans*. The main theme of the novel is universal love between Uncas, Chingachgook and Hawak-eye. Other related themes are the romantic love between Cora and Uncas, the question of "neutral ground" and the unimaginable massacre at the Fort William. The plot, structurally divided into two parts, represents the gradual rise of the dramatic action to its climactic moment in the massacre at the Fort Williams, finally signifies the universal love in humanity. However, the last prophetic utterance of Tamenund brings home the stark truth of dispossession of the Indians by the Europeans. As Uncas and the Hawk-eye are the richly drawn characters in their glory and romantic excess, other characters like Alice, Cora, Hayward and Munro are drawn for their functional value. As it is a sort of romance, where action dominates characters, we may not expect much depth of complexity in their portrayal.

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### 3.8 QUESTIONS

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1. Highlight the main critical approaches to *The Last of the Mohicans*.
2. Distinguish between the novel and romance.
3. Discuss the main qualities of the American novel. How does it differ from the English novel?
4. What are the themes of this novel?
5. Study the plot and characterization of *The Last of the Mohicans*.

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### 3.9 SUGGESTED READING

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Robert E. Spiller et al. *Literary History of the United States*.

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Bewley *The Eccentric Design*, London, 1959.

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George Dekker *James Fennimore Cooper The Novelist* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967.

Geoffrey Rans Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Stephen Railton *James Fennimore Cooper: A Study of His Life and Imagination*, Princeton University Press, 1978.

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R.W.B. Lewis *The American Adam*

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William P. Kelly *Plotting America's Past*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1983.

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## UNIT 4 PERSPECTIVES ON THE NOVEL-I

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### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 The Setting
- 4.2 "A Complex Feeling"
- 4.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.4 Questions
- 4.5 Suggested Reading

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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The aim in this unit is to discuss the central significance of the leather stocking hero Natty Bumppo. Various described as a symbol and aspiration, the cultural metaphor of the America's union of different races into signifying "a new humanity" in the New world, he evokes "a rich complex feeling" in us. Realized on a hierarchy of situations and moods and centrifugally representing the spectrum of American character, he is both a timeless archetypal construct, natural to all great aesthetic experiences.

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### 4.1 THE SETTING

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The Five Leatherstocking Tales, namely, *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Path Finder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841), written over a period of eighteen years by Cooper represent two ideas; 1. the dispossession of nature by civilization; 2. using these tales as the primitivist background, Cooper, while meditating in universal terms, the moral problems of man in a civilized society, namely, greed, exploitation and indifference to the plight of others, he focusses, in particular, the evolving American manners in its phase of Westward expansion, during his times. It also studies the American experiment of liberty and individualism in a democracy in, matters of collective good in an exploitative American society during his time.

Of the eight of the Westering frontier experiences, Cooper expressed, quite rightly though, immense confidence in the permanent appeal of the five Leatherstocking tales, starting from *The Pioneers* and ending with *The Deerslayer*, in their order of writing, thus:

If any thing from the writer of these romances is at all to outlive himself, it is, unquestionably, the series of the "Leatherstocking Tales". To say this ... is to simply to express the belief a will outlast any, or all of the works from the same hand.

The tales forming an engaging biography of their protagonist, Natty Bumppo, in his various forms and moods, from his young manhood among the Delaware Indians in New York in *The Deerslayer* and Pennsylvania to his death, in his early eighties in *The Prairie*, among the Pawnee tribes just West of the Mississippi River, constitute the core of Cooper's creative imagination, at a profound level, both as a chronicler of the American civilization in its westward march, and more importantly, as the nation's conscience in focussing its moral and material dilemmas at that time. By critically commenting upon it and also dramatizing or (melodramatizing) it, of the

theme of conquering the wilderness, of the many generations of men and women, who established civilization, or destroyed by its ills, he has universalized the spirit of liberty and expansion, so characteristic to the American character of his times. By placing these adventures also above time and place, he mythicised these men and women as the archetypal symbols of human desire for survival and enterprise. His romantic portrayal of the world of wonder and mystery and the steady advancing White settlers and its receding red men shaped the imagination of readers both at home and abroad.

The purpose of the Leatherstocking Tales is the myth and biography of its hero, the Natty Bumppo. Cooper employs the story of the Leatherstocking hero, to analyse the evolving setting of the American life and American character. To this extent, the Natty Bumppo is a detached, "outside" commentator, on the American setting. If he is one unchanging monolithic symbol of purity and innocence, morally, ethically spiritually, and unconsciously to himself, even in such concrete matters as economics, politics and society, he signifies perhaps atleast in a symbolic way, the contrast and corrective to the nascent American nation in its morals and manners in its modes of expansion and individual liberty. Thus, all the five Leatherstocking Tales are about defining, and if necessary, even correcting the American character, when it becomes corrupt and moves away from its great experiment. Though only in *The Pioneers*, *Last of the Mohicans* and *Deerslayer* the full impact of the romance of the forests is felt, in other novels, namely, *The Prairie* and *The Pathfinder*. Natty Bumppo carries the spirit of the wilderness in himself to offer the contrast between himself and the deviant (from the experiment) America.

Thus, as the Leatherstocking is central to all the five tales, we may have to read them from his own point of view, from his old age in *The Pioneers* to youthfulness in *The Deerslayer*, as according to DH Lawrence, the main purpose of Cooper is to dramatise the great American "myth of golden youth", "going back from old age to youth". Also, according to Lawrence, the main purpose of these tales is "to found a new relationship" between Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook towards "the inception of a new humanity". Inevitably, these are the two aims of these Tales.

The Leatherstocking is "inescapably one of the great characters of world literature. Not excepting Dostoevsky's Myshkin, there is no greater 'secular saint' than 'Natty Bumppo', according to George Dekker. Like all such characters, Natty Bumppo is also a tragi-comic character, modelled ultimately on Christ. As indicated by Plato in his *Republic*, there is always this confusion between the light and darker sides in this world in the mind of these saintly characters in literature, though finally they choose the brighter side, in the process, they appear to be naïve and even comical to us, with ordinary comprehension of the higher goals of human life. Though, Natty Bumppo, if seen in the tradition of Don Quixote, Parson Adams and Pickwick, has comic potentialities, Natty Bumppo, he does not appear to be merely frivolous or frolic some in these novels. He may be naïve, with a purpose, but certainly not frivolous. He is serious as he is guided by the particular purpose of living with nobler values in life. As he sets example by his action beyond guilt or moral inadequacy, he is a living and effective commentator of our frailties and corrupt actions.

In *Pioneers* (1823) the first of the saga of the *Leatherstocking Tales*, Cooper describes the eventual moral conflict in these tales, through the moral vision of Natty Bumppo, based on the cult of nature for its divine qualities, and Judge Temple; who though in principle, acquisitive to Natty Bumppo's, idyllic beliefs, finds a pragmatic answer to the problem of civilization in the process of uprooting the frontier. As the novel presents these two points of view, finally, Cooper seems to uphold Judge Temple in his social and Christian values. Thus, Cooper envisioning beyond the theme of wilderness, engineers a pragmatic solution through Judge Temple.

However, Natty Bumppo's moral significance and superiority is never in doubt in the novel. Setting the scene at Ostego Lake (Cooperstown) in 1793-94, Cooper

picturises a society just past the frontier stage. It is the return of the lost heir, Oliver Effingham, to claim inheritance that he mistakenly believes that Judge Temple has wrongfully appropriated, is the main point of description in the novel. But, more vital than this theme in the novel is, the moral conflict, at a fundamental level, between Judge Temple and the Leatherstocking hero. The land on which Templeton, the judge's, settlement, is built has been occupied for some forty years by Leatherstocking who still maintains his cabin on a nearly mountain. He had befriended Temple, when the Judge had first come to survey his lands and the judge out of gratitude allowed Leatherstocking to hunt on his estate. As Templeton develops, leading to the destruction of wilderness and its idyllic world, the judge and Natty Bumppo come inevitably into conflict. The hunter maintains a pious, moral view of nature and he considers nature's, opulence as God's gift for man's use. He believes that though a man is free to use the gifts of nature as he needs them, he should not unimaginatively destroy them. Thus, he laments as the settlers who destroyed nature at will. Billy Kirby, an expert axman and Richard Jones, the Judge's cousin and sheriff belong to this tribe of lawless exploiters of nature's bounties with impurity to their sacredness. Though Judge Temple himself sees nothing morally wrong in wilful destruction of nature in the process of civilization, in order to remove the waste and recklessness in the process, he takes recourse to civil law, the law of society. By doing so, he hoped that he would accord with the moral law of the Leatherstocking. However, the Leatherstocking only realizes that the society, inspite of the civil laws is senselessly and mindlessly destroying nature. It is difficult to believe for him, like him, the society at large, will be inspired by the some Christian values of humility before the power of Nature. He helplessly laments that nature is recklessly destroyed. Thus, Cooper comments on his role in the American drama in the last part of the novel. On his own free will, he leaves the settlement and disappears into the woods. He "had gone too far towards the setting sun – the foremost in that band of pioneers who are opening the way for the march of the nation across the continent". He becomes, therefore the inevitable herald of the civilization he most wants to avoid. Though the novel ends on a note of good society, Cooper believes that such a civilization need not be built on the price of the rape of the wilderness and the indiscriminate destruction of nature. Cooper believed in *The Pioneers* and *The Prairie* that all frontiersmen are not like the saintly Natty Bumppo, as he is more an idealized exception than the rule. His character is perfectly coherent and well developed. He is an ideal citizen of an ideal republic. Perhaps, his main defeat is that, with all his innate goodness and perfect nobility of character, he lacks the strength and missionary zeal of a reformer, as in Socrates or Don Quixote, making him ultimately become a helpless, tragic figure, though not a martyr, by his receding into the anonymous background.

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Natty Bumppo's (called Hawk-eye here) highly romanticized identification with Nature and Chingachgook is inalienably complete. Here as a chronicler of the massacre of civilizations and nature alike, he fades into the wilderness once again. Perching on a tantalizing balance on fantasy and grim realities (such as the massacre of the Fort William) of unthinkable horror and yet unbelievable tenderness between two human beings of two races, this novel is a masterpiece of marvellous energy. Perhaps, the rare union of minds – whether cultural miscegenation or not – between Chingachgook and Natty Bumppo is a triumph of optimism and foundation of universal civilization in the New World, as described by Cooper, in the words of Natty Bumppo:

"The gifts of our colours may be different, but God has so placed us as to journey in the same path. I have no kin, and I may also say, like you, no people. He was your son, and a reskin by nature ... the boy has left us for a time; but Sagamore, you are not alone." (p. 415).

Unlike *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, this is a novel of manners and social analysis. As in the two earlier *Tales*, here, too, man's relation to nature is fundamental as the landscape is even more vast and sublime so that characters seem

all but completely dwarfed and overpowered by the immensity of grass and sky that stretches in every direction. Here, the *Tales* appear to be moving towards the logical point of repose in the great death scene of the trapper. The relation of man to nature, as in the earlier two *Tales* is further developed in terms of the immensity of the treeless waste of the Great plains. The rape of the wilderness is described in less eloquent terms than in *The Pioneers*. The moral view of nature is reaffirmed in the abiding speeches of the aged trapper. The book is complementary to *Last of the Mohicans*. It describes the process that began in the eastern sea board with the dislocation of the Delawares and the setting of the forest wilderness now moves into the final phase. The exploiters here are not the settlers of the *Pioneers* who are building homes in the wilderness but their advance guard: Ishmael Bush and his tribe of landless squatters who admit no authority over themselves and whose function in the settling of the country, is to skim "the cream from the face of the earn and get "the very honey of nature". If the trapper represents the natural man who has disciplined himself as a result of his moral view of nature and earned his right to freedom, Ishmael Bush is the more usual type who confused liberty with licence. Dr. Obed Bat, a more sophisticated exploiter of nature, and the satirized physical scientist believes that science will become equal to the great moving principle. Though Cooper is not against the legitimate aims of freedom and knowledge in his portrayal of Bush and Bat, he is only attacking the physical and intellectual arrogance of the undisciplined man, even as Cooper dramatizes Natty Bumppo with the opposite quality of arrogance, namely humility in the face of the immensity of Nature. In this novel, the trapper is more religious than in the two *Tales*. By the end of the this novel, as the Leatherstocking, feeling distrustful of the social and civil law, detests the aberrations of freedom in Bush and Bat. Having achieved self-discipline, he decides to lead a free and asocial life in the woods. Away from the western path, he turns to the Great plains and finally dies physically defeated, though intellectually and morally he still maintains his deeply felt philosophy. Thus, these three *Tales* give us the meaning that the moral attitude of the Leatherstocking is more enduring for our lives

*The Pathfinder* and the *Deerslayer* the last Leatherstocking tales, written by Cooper after thirteen years, are naturally realized and related to the contemporary social problems. Thus *The Pathfinder* is strongly influenced by his *Home as Found*. However, the relation of this novel to the earlier three novels is obvious: the same characters of Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook reappear with the forceful evocation of the natural scenery. Here also, Cooper eulogizes God's power in each detail of Nature to process us the value of humility in the vast enormity of Nature. Though the same problems of the American waste of nature, the dispossession of the Indians and the march of civilization across the continent are recurrently present here, the real problem of the novel is social. Here, as Cooper insists that social station is important at all levels of society, since class lines exist everywhere and although they are not rigidly fixed, they are not to be crossed with impunity. The characters here are much below the level of the Effinghams. Viewed thus in the context of the order of Cooper's novels, this novel has less to say about American expansionism than about American social democracy. Though Cooper insists upon the class lines, he maintains that they have nothing to do with political democracy or the inherent value of men, Jasper and Pathfinder, are equal in virtue, though different in talent and experience. Though critics like Zoellner felt that this novel does not fit in the overall pattern of the Leatherstocking Tales, Cooper only moved the setting from the American past to the contemporary scene, without disturbing the moral purpose of relating Man to Nature as in the earlier Tales.

In his chronologically last, yet for the mind of the protagonist of these Tales, the youthful Leatherstocking, *Deerslayer* is one more occasion for celebrating man's pristine relationship with Nature in a productive manner without the sin of recklessness. Praised by D.H. Lawrence, and according to D.A. Ringe, this is the best of the series "in its complexity of meaning and in its affirmation of value in American life." It is also less concerned with the march of American civilization,

than with the question of popular American values. Like *The Pathfinder*, it concentrates on lovely characters and is concerned with considerable social import, with a moral purpose. This novel, with its strong religious tone finally affirms the true purpose of the Tales, that is, realise Nature as a sacred place for man's welfare, and for his happiness and comfort, if it is not exploited mercilessly. Set in the wonderful ambience of the Glimmerglass, which shines like a jewel in the wilderness of the trees, there is this story of Deerslayer and Hetty. If Hetty symbolizes the Christian values in their flawless purity, Hurry represents the pragmatic and expedient considerations of life. Between these extremes of purity and cynical expediency stands Deerslayer. He follows the law of nature (than the law of God). He is on his first war path. For, till then he has been a hunter, not a warrior. As Iyvor Winters praises this part of the book, here as Deerslayer confronts his first enemy, he graciously offers him a chance for his life and by the quickness of his eye shoots his first human being. In killing him and a second Indian, he is not the aggressor. Here, Deerslayer, discovering a practical compromise between the best and the worst in man is imperfect and fallible, but he is also, according to Brady "an embodied conscience for America". By combining the moral values of the American landscape with the moral vision of the Moravian missionaries, he represents a kind of genuine humility, unselfish and unconcerned with the impediments of the American life and he affirms the American principle by calmly enforcing his intuitive law of natural goodness to others. Yet, this novel may not end on an optimistic note as the struggle between the whiteman in his march and the red Indians will continue. The settlers will come with the axe and gun to crop the trees as in *The Pioneers*. Thus, this novel is the logical culmination of the Leatherstocking series. It affirms a set of values that were implicit in the earlier tales. Also, economic expediency in Hurry and Tom is the same idea which Cooper criticized in his other works, namely, *The Bravo*, *The Heidenmauer* and *The Monikins*. Thus, this novel fully rounds off the two themes of the Leatherstocking tales, namely, the religious view of human character of being naturally good, instructed by the pious values of the landscape and in opposition to it, the corrupt economic practices of the expedient American citizens of his times. Thus, Cooper's five Leatherstocking tales are studies in moral principles in lofty universal terms, as much as incisive and thoughtful and pertinent criticism and even disapproval of the unChristian and expedient practices of the expanding American nation of his times.

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## 4.2 A "COMPLEX FEELING"

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In all the five Leatherstocking tales, Natty Bumppo in various forms and moods, evokes "a complex feeling" of situation and circumstance and different levels of naivette as well as a profound moral sense. As it is, indeed, truly difficult to define him in a single or simple way, it is also good for us to evoke his "complex" image in a hierarchy of conditions: he is a good Samaritan without a cross, yet he is a pious Christian in practice; he is naïve and inoffensive, yet if situation warrants, he is capable of intelligent thinking; he is closest to the Indians in his fundamental emotion and sentiment, yet he seeks separate (though unknown) racial identity; he is a whiteman, yet he does not approve of the whiteman's immoral and reckless dispossession of either nature or the Indians, as they are one and the same in his view; ultimately, he is an ideal image, yet his solutions to the problems are not evasive but pragmatic. Thus, he evokes in us a complex feeling of all these apparently opposite ideas and states of mind.

As he is the myth and symbol, the means of expatiation and communion with the frontier and its Indian natives, he forms a multi-faceted centrifugal force around whom all the five Leatherstocking Tales move and eventually draw their sustenance. As he is the ideologue of these five narratives, he also becomes America's cultural and mythopaeic history. By re-creating the imaginative tales of this frontier man, Cooper has become America's myth-maker.

These Natty Bumppos, positioning themselves in a unique disjunction from both the Indians and the Whites, culturally and religiously, they are in themselves both. As they are drawn from unknown sources, they are the Boones, the Crockets, the Carsons, the advance scouts thrown out by civilization, in one of the least known humanity in history. Equally significant is the fact that he vaguely remembers his unknown White home of his early childhood. He is reared by Moravian missionaries among the friendly Delawares, where the instruction of the brethren seems to have been limited to the Gospel, as Natty remains illiterate and largely uninformed about the world without wilderness.

His religion is fruitfully ambivalent as when he repeatedly emphasizes, he is a man without a holy cross. Yet, he is a Christian in practice. His identity with the Indians is equally uncertain in all the Tales. In the *Deerslayer*, he confirms his allegiance to the young Delaware Chief, Chingachgook, by risking his life in seemingly hopeless battle to rescue his friend's beloved, Wah-ta-wah. In *The Pathfinder*, his ultimate temptation to join civilization is to overcome when he renounces all claim to the hand of Mabel Dunham. In *The Pioneers*, he is completely bewildered by the man-made laws of the town of Templeton. Thus, this novel, which signifies a symbolic, though painful cultural journey for the Natto Bumppo, from noble savagery to noble civilization, in the mystic of Nature itself, as when finally he travels to spend his last days in the Great plains among the Pawnes, thus establishing uniqueness, and a separate, though mysterious cultural identity from the Indians, though he is part of the adopted Indians called Delawares. However, it may be held, with some certainty that, between the two, Natty Bumppo, religiously, at least, appears to be closer to the White man's religion when he requests (In *The Deerslayer*) that the grave stone be inscribed with "something from the holy book."

In any case, as the Natty Bumppo is devoid of any certain definitive position of identity, religious or cultural, he takes a vantage position in objectively assessing both the Whites and the Indians in themselves as creatures of Nature. For him, as men are, in the main, much the same in feeling, he explains his theory in *The Deerslayer* thus:

God, made us all, white, black and red; and no doubt, had his wise intentions in coloring us differently ... I'll not deny that he gave each race its gifts. A whiteman's gifts are Christianized, while a red skin's are more for the wilderness. Thus, it would be a great offense for a white man to scalp the dead; whereas it is a signal virtue for an Indian. Then again the whiteman cannot ambush women and children in war, while redskin may. It's cruel work, I'll allow; but for them it's *lawful* work; while for "us," it would be grievous work.

Though driven by a variety of motives – such as discontent, misanthropy and even adventurism and thus separated from the main body of society, to live alone in the mysterious, uncharted recesses of the forest, their skills, knowledge and service, in any case, are of immense use to society. They are often called upon to be agents for a way of life, which, ironically, they wanted to flee away from. They blazed trails, hunted game, negotiated with the Indians and, in general, taught the pioneer families how to survive in the vast American wilderness, and unfortunately and even tragically, too, they were pushed still farther Westward and overtaken by the very civilization, which they helped to grow. In any case, they lived with their own philosophy of life. For them, the underlying human kinship might prevail over the traits induced by training. However, Cooper does not appear to suggest the assimilation of the Indians with Natty Bumppo. There is an intense critical debate on this issue. For critics like, D.H. Lawrence, the romanticised union of minds of Natty and Chingachgook is the true basis of future human relationships in the New World. However, for other critics, there is an attempt at cultural miscegenation. More than the failure of the union of Cora and Unces, the failure of Natty Bumppo to live with

Chingachgook forever, is more tragic and even may indicate a particular attitude of Cooper to the whole question of races in America at that time. In any case, we feel that there may be one Lord of all and in the mind of God all may be the same so that in heaven, Chingachgook's son, Uncas may be United with Cora, but on earth, there can be no such union. Thus, betrayed by circumstances of civilization of the Whitemen, Natty Bumppo carries his existence with an aura of melancholy with a profound wisdom, like a prophet, victim, as also like a victim of the Whiteman's atonement. His concern for the Indian is in two stages; first, it is his deep love for his own adoptive tribe, the Delawares; then, it extends to the whole Indian race as it confronted the white man. For him, with the decline of the Delawares and Mohicans, due to the cruel Iroquois, the noblest elements of the savage life have been lost. This melancholic reflection is the recurrent mood throughout the Tales, though most intensely felt in Uncas' funeral rites at the end of *The Last of the Mohicans*. At the end of this novel, the prophetic words of the venerable Tammany that "the pale-faces are the masters of the earth and the time of the red man has not yet come again", make the Natty Bumppo despair for the whole Indian race. He bemoans thus:

"When I look about me at these hills, where I used to count sometimes twenty smokes, curling over the tree-tops, from the Delaware camps, it raises mournful thoughts, to think that not a red-skin is left of them all ..."

Natty's intimacy and abiding love for the minds of the Indians and the spirit of the frontier is deep-rooted. He "loved" everything that is there in the frontier in a real sense. As he tells Judith Hutter of *The Deerslayer*, his love is "in the boughs of the trees, in a soft rain, in the dew on the open grass, in the clouds that float ... and in all the other glorious gifts that come from God's providence." It certainly evokes a feeling of ineradicable guilt in the minds of all the thoughtful Americans for the ruthless and criminal dispossession of the Indians. We do find such moments of national guilt in the works of Melville in the north, in Faulkner, in the south, and Miller in the east.

Natty Bumppo's qualities of mind may be simplicity and courage. According to Middleton in *The Prairie*, Natty is endowed with simplicity, because such are the habits of his mind. In courage, he is "the equal of his red associates"; in his war-like skill, he is their superior. He is gifted with a special kind of piety. Piety and natural compassion temper his justice. This is clearly manifested in *The Last of the Mohicans*, when a wounded Huron slips from the tree on a cliff, where he has been hanging, Natty uses his last charge of powder to bring an instant death in mid-air far less horrible than that awaiting on the rocks below. Also, in Delaware, when Natty is forced to shoot a human being for the first time, he is tender and merciful to his dying enemy, even though that Mingo has twice tried to take Natty's life by treachery. The innocence with which he enters the silent forest alone at dawn, his courage when attacked and his refusal to attack a disadvantaged enemy and his compassion even for a dying enemy – all carry religious significance in the manner of the pure heart for the Holy Grail. Essentially uninterested in land, and property as he believes that "if man has a chest, filled with either dollars or half-joes, he may be said to lock up his heart in the same book." He remains a celebrator throughout his life. He is religious only in its qualities of natural piety. As this religiosity sustains his thoughts and actions, he only sees the "essence" of things. He quite rightly sees the manifestations of the divine will everywhere. Scorning the written word, he explains his purity of purpose in his life and imagination in these words in *The Last of the Mohican*:

"I have heard it said that there are men who read in books to convince themselves there is a God. I know not but man may so deform his works in the settlement, as to leave that which is so clear in the wilderness a matter of doubt among traders and priests. If any such there be, and he will follow me from sun to sun, through the windings of the forest, he shall see enough to teach him that he is a fool..." (p.269)

At times, as his worship of the spirit of Nature becomes even Pantheistic and Wordsworthian, in accepting Nature as a moral guide, he believes that Nature is the house of the Lord, the only church in which he can work satisfactorily. He explains this idea in *The Pathfinder*:

“... I have endeavoured to worship garrison – fashion, but never could raise within me the solemn feelings and true affection that I feel when alone with God in the forest. There I seem to stand face to face with my Master; all around me is fresh and beautiful, as it comes from His hand; and there is no nicety of doctrine to chill the feelings. No, no; the woods are the true temple a’ter all, for there the clouds are free to mount higher even than the clouds.”

As he withdraws into the limitless frontier wilderness, he is remembered as “a man who had the simplicity of a woodsman, the heroism of a savage, the faith of a Christian and feelings of a poet. A better man than he, seldom lived!” And quite rightly, he is “the most memorable character American fiction has given the world.” To Leslie Fiedler, he is “the prototype of all pioneers, trappers, cowboys and other innocently destructive children of nature, of the Westerner. He is “a Faust without a sin”, with his denial of the calvinist or catholic theology and acceptance of the suffering in his quest for freedom. Along with Chingachgook, he represents two mythic figures: himself the hunter and Chingachgook, nature’s vanishing nobleman and vanishing American. These two timeless, mythic figures between themselves represent a third myth, an archetypal relationship of two lonely men – one dark-skinned and the other White – living together in the virgin heart of the American wilderness. They have grown up for the sake of their austere and unquestionable love, which binds them to each other and to the world of nature, which they have preferred to civilization. According to DH Lawrence, “in his immortal friendship of Chingachgook and Natty Bumppo, Cooper dreamed of the nucleus of a new society.” This is the import of their relationship. Thus, Natty Bumppo is the timeless archetype of our yearning for purity, innocence and near flawless perfection.

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### 4.3 LET US SUM UP

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Thus, the Leatherstocking hero, Natty Bumppo discussed in two parts in this unit, represents the particular stage of American history in the nineteenth century. Dramatized in the extant landscape of the frontier, which itself forms an endlessly inscrutable order of reality, the Leatherstocking symbolizes, perhaps, all that is best in human nature. Incapable of any form of evil, and nearing total perfection, the hero here evokes a rich complex feeling – of geography, history, society. He is our new vertible pure Adam, in his own Paradise of the Frontier, making *The Last of the Mohicans* a poem in execution and lyrical in appeal. It is an experience beyond words. Larger than life, as the setting is magnificent, Natto Bumppo is a supremely idealised and romanticized human self.

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### 4.4 QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss the significance of setting in the portrayal of Natty Bumppo.
2. Discuss the essential nature of the Leatherstocking hero.
3. Comment on the romantic quality of the novel *The Last of the Mohicans*.

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**4.5 SUGGESTED READING**

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D.H. Lawrence *Studies in Classic American Literature*, NY; Viking Press, 1923.

Yvor Winters *In Defence of Reason*.

G.Dekker *James Fennimore Cooper*, London; Routledge and Kegan Paul,  
1967.

Daniel Peck New Essays on *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cambridge University  
Press, 1992.

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## UNIT 5 PERSPECTIVES ON THE NOVEL-II

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### Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Order in his Social Novels and Other Novels with Political Import
- 5.2 Cooper's Moral Vision in *The Leatherstocking Tales*
- 5.3 Conclusion
- 5.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.5 Questions
- 5.6 Suggested Reading

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### 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, we discuss the moral edifice of Cooper's works. In his extensive canon of nearly thirty works, there is recurrent moral strain in all of them. Here, we realise that the moral basis for order in his social novels and other works with political import, and his romanticization of world of moral piety through the Leatherstocking hero, is similar and identical. For, the ultimate goal of his all-round imagination is to enshrine Christian values of goodness in action and thoughts in America of his times.

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### 5.1 ORDER IN HIS SOCIAL NOVELS AND OTHER WORKS WITH POLITICAL IMPORT

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As in the imagination of any great writer, art and prophesy organically fuse themselves in a visionary moment to signify a nation's moral concerns and evoke feelings of true joy in the reader's minds, in Cooper, too, such a creative fusion occurs in realising his moral vision. As his moral vision originates from a particular milieu of the 19<sup>th</sup> century America in the throes of expansion in every material sphere as well as in its fundamental desire for self-identity culturally, spiritually and intellectually, all his creative canon has to be read as representing this singular desire and design of Cooper. For, underlying all his apparently different modes of perception of the adolescent America, after its Puritanical infant bearings, there is a continuously guiding moral purpose. That moral purpose is, leading a truly Christian life in all forms of activities in the individual and in America's social, political and economic activities. As the nation grows, a true concern for Christian values should guide their all-round activities.

Although at first glance, there appears to be a great disparity between the Leatherstocking tales of the 1820's and the social criticism which followed, and between the dark novels of the 1840's and the Littlepage series that succeed them, all are seen to be closely related, as they in their totality, dramatize a broad view of the American life and the role of the individual in it. Thus, there is no such dichotomy of any kind between his mainstay romantic Leatherstocking tales and his social criticism on the concrete issues of the American life. As observed by Brady, all his Cooper's works are much more alike in their themes. For, fundamental to his works, there is a moral view of the world and men in their social aspects. This moral view reveals man's relation first to God in the order of nature and to his fellows in an ordered society. Viewed in this perspective, the moral tales of the forest and sea have a general social significance, as they set up standards for men to follow in a social relation. His social theories were intelligible to his contemporary readers only if seen in relation to the moral concepts that in his view form the basis of all social organizations. Even the supposed contradictions in Cooper's political thought are

easily reconciled when we finally perceive the moral view that formed the basis for his criticism of both the aristocratic and democratic systems. Therefore, it is important for us to notice the consistency of his intellectual position in his creative canon. His creative canon may be studied for this purpose in two parts: in the first part, we may discuss his moral view, as a sort of individual's responsibility to society, in his social novels and other works with a sort of political import. In the second part, we may discuss his moral and spiritual view of the wilderness.

Basic themes recur throughout his fiction. From the beginning in *The Spy*, Cooper draws a picture of the loss of order in society and the moral confusion that results out of such a loss, a theme he presents again in such works as *The Two Admirals* and *Wyandotté*. The essential concern of Cooper in his social fiction and other works with a political import, is to establish a social order based on the collective responsibility of all the individuals for their welfare. In *The Spy*, he draws a picture of the loss of order in society and resultant moral confusion. He repeats this theme in the *Two Admirals* and *Wyandotté*. Without the proper subordination throughout society, man loses the ability to make intelligent choices and act on the basis of principles. In many of his characters, Cooper clearly demonstrates the dangers that are always incurred when order is destroyed. But, for him, as for any progressive visionary, order does not imply a rigidly stratified social hierarchy, sustained by vested interests. He, therefore, believes that social change is as much necessary, based on the principle of individual's responsibility for working for the total good. What he abhors is selfishness of the individuals in perpetuating social disorder. What he believes is that these values of collective responsibility and pleasure for others, and sharing the joys and difficulties with and for others sake, is a moral value, which is central to the his Leatherstocking Tales. But, he believes this idea in his social and other works, too, when he says that, all human actions even in modern societies can be tempered with those Christian values of good Samaritanship and honesty and purity of mind and action. To this extent, his social and other works eulogize the same Christian moral value, in varied settings, providing an organic continuity and holistic view of all his imagination.

What is his attitude to democracy? For, this is one area of his thinking, perhaps, most misunderstood. Though a steady Jacksonian - a change from the Federalist vision of his politically conservative father though with the image of a patriarch), Cooper was misunderstood that he was an advocate of the rule of the aristocracy. But, a careful reading of *Home as Found*, *The Redskins* and *The Ways of the Hour* indicates his faith in democracy not simply as a political idea, but as a much deeper faith in God's sanctioning of equality of opportunity to every individual with a capability for achieving all-round perfection.

Politically, he accepted democracy with all its defects. He detested aristocracy and oligarchy. For him, democracy was the only hope, as he believed that, if properly followed, it would bring out unity and stability in society with a progressive change. What he objected to was only that democracy should not lose itself in limitless and irresponsible freedom of a few people, to the detriment a vast majority of poor and orderly people. Hence, he wanted that every individual should have limited freedom under restraints and these restraints must come through a religious view of the world. Such a restriction of freedom for the good of the society is envisioned by him in the idyllic world of the Leatherstocking, where the spirit of humility before the power of God's nature is the main value and wisdom of humanity. Here, the moral of message of the Tales is that an individual is insignificant before the vastness of the landscape. For this reason, many of his characters such as Miles Wallingford, Mark Woolston and Roswell Gardiner are taught the lesson of their own insignificance, so that they might develop the spirit of humility they need as good members of a free society. But, Cooper also realized that mere naturalistic appeal may not make all individuals morally pious, as Ishmael Bush and Aaron Thouandacres are unaffected by the natural scene. Perhaps, it is not merely nature's intimations, but more faithful adherence to the principles of the Christian religion that would bring about a lasting

transformation of character. Thus, this Christian transformation of the soul is the implicit theme of his works from *The Wept of Wish-too-wish* to *The Deerslayer*. In the remaining works, *The Oak Openings* and *The Sea Lions*, this Christian theme becomes more explicit and dominant. Disbelieving in the mere abstract Christian virtues and the radical Protestant churches, he finally believed that proper restraints to an individual's behaviour could be found in the conservative churches, like the Episcopalian, where belief is not subject to change at the will of the congregation. He also believed that education and training would teach his gentlemen heroes humility. By turning away from the contemporary American scene, he succeeded in revivifying the native scene with greater objectivity. *The Bravo* presents a convincing picture of a complex social organization drawn with enough circumstantial detail. *The Pioneers* and *Satanstoe* reveal simpler societies without sufficient faith in their moral values. In all these three social novels, there is an interplay of plot and character and setting, as characters carry the main weight of meaning. Cooper is successful in drawing characters from a relatively low social class.

In his fiction, the creative and moral continuum between a "knowledgeable" landscape and (morally) inadequate humanity, the former "instructing" the latter, is the main focus of his imagination, starting from *The Pilot* to *The Deerslayer*. In each case, the wilderness has a fundamental religious meaning. It is variously revivified in myth and living symbol of piety and a source of divine manifestation, in itself. In particular, in the Leatherstocking tales, the reckless exploitation of nature by the whites and the inadvertently felicitating such a massacre of nature's spirit by the Leatherstocking, is itself a profound moral problem. If the whites evilsomely dispossessed nature of its spirit, the Leatherstocking heroes, in a mood of resignation, become mute witnesses, thus indirectly corroborating in the dispossession of nature and the Indians, their spiritual templates, constituting a painful moral problem in Cooper's fiction. In the Leatherstocking tales, the moral and spiritual space of Cooper's works increases abundantly manifold.

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## 5.2 COOPER'S MORAL VISION IN *THE LEATHERSTOCKING TALES*

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The vast frontier acts as a form of providing moral and spiritual vision of perfection of human behaviour. Though these "the romances of the forest", following his nautical experience, appear to be vastly different, they, along with his European novels, all provide a central vision and Cooper's world-view, that is to say, like Wordsworth, the frontier for him, too, is a source of empathy and moral perfection among the members of society. As his immensely special gifts lie in evocatively scaffolding his narrative experiences, they seem to echo, through their resonant life, vibrant and cruel, all alike, certain fundamental, ever-lasting truths of men and his civilization. If Natty Bomppo is the truest and closest manifestation of the purified sensibility of Nature, there is, perhaps, no character in *The Last of the Mohicans*, as in his other Leatherstocking Tales, who is not positively mystified and even made divine in one's own way by the elemental purity of the soul of Nature. According to Conrad, for Cooper, nature was "an essential factor in the problem of existence". As the frontier and the sea interpenetrate, each of his work shows the essential picture of man in a sort of creative immensity with the vast physical universe in the form of Nature. Thus, he expresses "a great religious vision of life", in depicting man's relation to his natural environment. Through his descriptions of the majestic order of the natural landscape, he is able to present the principle of divine harmony in nature, as also the fundamental need for humility in men to grasp the immensity of God as revealed thro' processes of Nature. Thus, Cooper shows the importance of religious view in his portrayal of man in relation to the enormity of physical nature.

As Heyward subsumes the racial insignificance, when he says, "who that looks at this creature of nature, remembers the shade of his skin?" (p. 54 *The Last of the Mohicans*) or as when Chingachhook proclaims thus, "with an Indian its a matter of conscience; what he calls himself, he generally is", or when Hawkeye advises Cora and Alice, "better and wiser would it be, if he could understand the signs of nature, and take a lesson from the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the fields" (p. 140) – all these are the living manifestations of the rare union of the spirit of Man and Nature in their creative continuity. They create newer realms of joy, and sense in our minds.

This interrelationship of man and Nature is demonstrated from the beginning in his work from *Spy*, where the physical setting defines both the problem as also the moral tone calling for empathy between man and nature. In the same way in *The Last of the Mohicans* also, Nature, variously manifested as violent, savage, cruel, unpredictable and wild, by including the Indians Cooper is studying the problem of the impossible and greatly inhospitable wilderness. As it is a source of moral goodness, no man or woman is unaffected by its moral force. *The Last of the Mohicans* is dominated by the virgin forest. The moment Duncan Heyward leads the girls, Alice and Cora Munro, between Forts Edward and William Henry, even as he loses control over his environment to become an easy prey to the machinations of the evil Magua, he realizes the true physical immensity of the frontier as also its moral significance in human life, in his conversation with Hawk-eye, the nature's true priest:

"What is to be done!" he said, the utter helplessness of doubt in such a pressing strait. "Desert me not, for God's sake! Remain to defend those, escort, and freely name your own reward!" (p.44)

and

"Uncas is right! It would not be the act of men to leave such harmless things to their fate, even though it breaks up the harboring place for ever. If you would save these tender blossoms from these fangs of the worst of serpents, gentlemen, you have neither time to lose nor resolution to throw away!" (p.44)

To this Hawk-eye replies thus:

"Offer your prayers to Him who can give us wisdom to circumvent the cunning of the devils who fill these woods, but spare your offers of money which neither you may live to realize, nor I do profit by. These Mohicans and I will do what man's thoughts can invent, to keep such flowers, though so sweet, were never made for the wilderness, from harm, and that without hope of any other recompense but such as God always gives to upright dealings." (pp.44-45).

From this point, till the end of the novel, all the white characters, except Hawkeye, are at the mercy of the wilderness and its red Indian inhabitants. Even Monteclem and the victorious French cannot completely govern their Huron allies after the evacuation of the fort, even as the French commander himself fails to comprehend, in any plausible way, the immensity of the problem on hand. In the massacre at Fort William Henry, the Indians clearly dominate the whites who have invaded their lands. Even the English characters, who ultimately succeed in recovering the stolen Alice from the Hurons must rely upon their Indian friends, the Delawares, to escape from being totally destroyed by the wilderness. Without Chingachgook and Uncas, even the mightily resourceful Hawkeye could have achieved little.

We should also reckon with the ghastly scale of events, out of all proportions of our "civilized" imagination, where whole armies are swallowed up in the living mass of vast vegetation, only to some how retain their mere forms. The entire struggle between the British and French troops seems trivial when viewed against the vast

canopy of nature's might. Cooper's elevation of the landscape to immense proportions of space certainly dwarfs any of our human species. Even as Heyward, at the beginning, an undoubtedly sane, and self-confident white man, is bewildered, to say the least, even as he is constantly guided by Hawkeye. As Hawkeye knows the frontier and its savage inhabitants, in every form and manner, intrinsically as well as extrinsically, he tells Heyward that his white man's judgement will never comprehend the true spirit of the frontier and the Indians there. In any case, the massacre of English whites at the William Henry, perhaps, outmatches even the unbelievable savagery of the Indian savages, by its trickery and lack of code of honour and poignant ruthlessness.

As for Cooper, wildermen is nature's manifestation of the divine moral law, as he nearly idealizes and revivifies it in myth and symbol, landscape and striking picturesqueness. The darkness and density of the virgin forest that stretches unbroken from the Hudson to the Mississippi are intensely felt in *The Last of the Mohicans*. These following images of the wilderness are evocative for their variety of feelings, of awe, wonder, sheer lyrical delight and horror, alike:

The mountain on which they stood, elevated perhaps a thousand feet in the air, was a high cone that rose a little in advance of that range which stretches for miles along the western shores of the lake, until meeting its sister piles, beyond the water, it ran off toward the Canadas, in confused and broken masses of rock thinly sprinkled with evergreens. ... To the north stretched the limpid, and as it appeared from that dizzy height, the boys, embellished by fantastic headlands, and dotted with countless islands. At the distance of a few leagues, the bed of the waters became lost among mountains, or was wrapped in the masses of vapor that came slowly rolling along their bosom, before a light morning air ( p. 159).

The landscape is evoked in its moments of silence, in sheer poetic detail:

The evening was delightfully calm, and the light air from the limpid water fresh and soothing. It seemed as if, with the termination to the roar of artillery and the plunging of shot, the nature had also seized the moment to assume her mildest and most captivating form. The sun poured down his parting glory on the scene, without the oppression of those fierce rays that belong to the climate and the season. The mountains looked green and fresh and lovely; tempered with the milder light, or softened in shadow, as thin vapours floated between them and the sun. (p. 168).

Now, the landscape is like "some pictured allegory of life:"

The fiercer element had cropped the verdure of the plain, which looked as though it were scathed by the consuming lightning. But, here and there, a dark green tuft rose in the midst of the desolation; the earliest fruits of a soil that had been fattened with human blood. The whole landscape, which seen by a favoring light, and in a genial temperature, had been found so lovely, appeared now like some pictured allegory of life, in which objects were arrayed in their harshest but truest colors, and without relief of any shadowing (p.209).

It is also endowed with a spirit of mystery:

Within the bosom of the encircling hills, an impenetrable darkness had already settled; and the plain lay like a vast and deserted charnel house, without omen or whisper to disturb the slumbers of its numerous and hapless tenants (p.221).

Once again, the landscape is evoked with immaculate detail, like some wall painting".

## Perspectives on the Novel-II

A short distance from the place where Duncan stood, the stream had seemingly expanded into a little lake, covering most of the low land from mountain to mountain. The water fell out of this wide basin in a cataract so regular and gentle that it appeared rather to be the work of human hands than fashioned by nature (p.255).

and

The scene was at once animated and still. All that pertained to nature was sweet, or simply grand: while those parts which depended on the temper and movements of man were lively and playful. (p.168).

The outposts of civilization are swallowed up in the dense wilderness. It is not merely a literary canon, as it is an instructive "*presence*." It instructs the supposedly "civilized" humanity, in its universality, the twin values of social order and moral responsibility towards others in distress. He believes that man's, relation to God is in fruitfully revealed in nature's order in first achieving individual moral purpose and then social harmony. To this extent, all these Tales have a profound moral and social purpose, in that, nature evokes by its pristine purity, an immense moral piety. They establish standards for men to follow in a social relation – be it in the relationship between Chingachgook and Hawkeye or Hawkeye and Heyward or between Cora and Uncas, and so on. The cruelty of Magua is in this sense, an isolated instance of lack of any sort of desire of social or collective wisdom, making him a repeated outcast in his own race.

Cooper's political ideas are also tempered by these democratic values of equality of opportunity and power, enshrined in the values of "civilization" (of its own variety) in the order and rule and control and regulation of power. If anything, as betrayal is unknown to their political behaviour, underlying their cruel savage habits, there is an organized and dependable political order of customs and delegation and trust of power in the natives. As they are pure and simple in their instincts, their governance is also simple and easily accountable, as it is eventually based on the principle of inviolable faith in one another. They love their instincts. As their instincts are shaped by altering nature's moods and purposes, they, again and again, seek confirmation of their faith and accuracy and justifiability of their action, by truly understanding the spirit and meaning of nature's message, making their judgements of men and actions instinctively infallible.

According to Hawk-eye Natty Bumppo, "with an Indian 'tis a matter of conscience; what he calls himself, he generally is – that Chingachgook . . . understands the windings and turnings of human nature" (pp.58-59). He eulogises the spirit of nature as true wisdom in these words: "I should be but a poor scholar for one who had studied so long in the wilderness, did I not know how to set forth the movements and nature of such a beast" (p.303). Even Magua, the archetypal outcast in any society, most passionately glorifies the mind and true character of the natives in these words, to David: "Therein you belie the nature of an Indian. Even the Mingo adores but the true and living God. 'Tis a wicked fabrication of the whites, and I say it to be the shame of my color that would make the warrior bow down before images of his own creation." (p.264) Uncas reinforces the free spirit of nature in his words to Tamenund (p.366):

Men of the Lenni Lenape! . . . my race upholds the earth! Your feeble tribe stands on my shell! What fire that a Delaware can light would burn the child of my fathers . . . the blood that came from such a stock would smother your flames! My race is the grandfather of nations!" (p.366)

As they derive their moral strength from the wilderness, their logic is also shaped by a rare instinct and intuitive understanding of the universe. As their empathy with nature is spiritual, they live and relive to enact the recurrent cycle of the processes of nature in a sort of mythical cycle.

Whenever there is a reason for disorder and moral failure or confusion as in *The Spy*, Cooper seems to suggest that a proper social order, based on moral purity, is necessary for the individual survival. In many of his characters, he clearly illustrates the dangers that follow when order (of the nature) in human life is destroyed. When the settled social order on the basis of moral vision of purity and simplicity of nature is destroyed, individuals try to practise their own rather expedient practices, as in the case of Mr. Wharton, Joel Strides and Admiral Blue water and Captain Willoughby. In any case, as Cooper does not believe in a static order (but in a stable order), he recognizes the essential place of conflict between the settled order and change, in the history of progress of man and his society.

Perhaps, all the five *Leatherstocking Tales* as one group, in his canon, dramatize this idea of the conflict between progress versus old order. Certainly, the first three novels are entirely concerned with this theme. By invading the wilderness and seizing the lands of the Indians, the whites disrupt the red man's life, destroy the game, and wreak havoc with the natural scene. Leatherstocking, the man who has seen the proper course of conduct revealed in the harmony of nature, protests the ravishing of his beloved forests by men like Ishmael Bush, or the settlers of Templeton, who feel none of the restraints of the hunter. For these men, Judge Temple must impose the civil law and the Leatherstocking falls in its meshes. All this is said to be in the name of higher good, in the name of Christianity. Thus, though Cooper does approve of change, he seems to say that care must be taken so that the intrinsic values of the Leatherstocking must not be lost in the greedy exploitation of the wilderness. This is the guiding moral, democratic principle of subsisting with the essence of Nature that completes his world-view of progress with change.

As he believed that democracy is not absolute liberty but only limited freedom under proper restraints, he seems to suggest through characters such as Leatherstocking and Long Tom Coffin that through proper spirit of humility, man might achieve progress, when he perceives his own insignificance in the vastness of the virgin landscape. Even the idea of the neutral ground becomes in itself an essential factor in the action. For to a considerable degree, the characters derive their mind and thinking in their relation to the living environment.

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, we encounter space "rawly imagined, fearfully projected". In it, Cooper found the lingering wilderness of New York of his childhood days in Ostego, on the Lake Ontario, where he gained "most of his notions of a new country". This Oswego, with its limited population, and political tension with the rumour of war between England and Canada, was in real life terms, the "neutral ground", so veily the symbolic locale of his fiction. Besides, when Cooper visited Lake George in the upper Hudson valley in 1824, he decided that he should write a book on the setting of the Glenn's Fall. Thus, it is as if, he held the falls in his mind's eye. In a way, he created the nature by his imagination by "erasing history" and its "accumulated burden of culture". He created the Glenn's Falls "unburdened by human signs". He "erased" some of the events on Fort William as it was reimagined and reinvented by him. He, reconstructed the past scenes, in the larger American landscape, within "the human psyche" itself. To this extent, by internalizing nature's spirit, he erased its historical landmarks as mere topical details. As wilderness is violently heard - and seen with bizzare interest - with its own language of sounds (of yells, cries shrieks) and eeriness - displacing the "civilized" language of the whites and French, alike, the reader's fears of being lost in the wilderness for ever, are to some extent, related to Cooper's desire to take us into the primordial energy of nature itself. In this novel, though Cooper apparently bases his

fiction, on easily verifiable facts of history, he moves with "a ponderous insistence" towards a (new) vision of history by including the savagery, fact and the symbol of universality of love, demonstrated in the spirit of Nature. At least, in one instance, Cooper's account of the massacre is not without historical justification, as noted by Jonathan Carver, an eye-witness, and as also noted in the *New York Mercury* on August 22, 1757. However, as he frequently places these events against a generalized historical backdrop, he appears more like an observer, than being in it. By implicating Monteclem and by suggesting apparently one set of laws for the Indians and another for the Whiteman, he is merely subsuming well-known historical, divisive realities, of another "kind of history of requiem" for native Americans to tell them the tales of their brethern, disposed. Sadly dispossessed by the whites but always protected by nature, by its fury and savagery and warm fraternity and loyalty, alike these red Indians live by their own timeless history. Responding to the significance of killing the Colt, before the actual massacre, Shirley Samuels sees "a miscegenation between nature and culture". For, according to one of the legends, Cooper may be drawing on, the Lenni-Lenape myth, about the origin of human beings, involves a hunter encountering and killing a deer and returning to the people with its meat, who will share it. Then, all the members of the race follow the hunter into the world. This pursuit of the culture is accomplished by the pursuit and consumption of the natural. Thus, the killing and eating of the animal explicitly leads the hunter to a sort of nature worship, a worship of the Mother Earth.

Thus, finally, to round off the debate of Cooper's moral vision in both his social novels and the Leatherstocking Tales, the question of the content of his moral vision arises. Connecting the moral concerns in both the realms, in the contemporary American society and the Leatherstocking Tales, is the image of a Christian gentleman, representing the standard moral behaviour. Cooper, without anticipating the upheavals of civil war and industrialization that were to transform the American society, firmly adhered to a stable, agrarian social order, ruled by the landed gentleman who, properly schooled and with leisure to study and learn, would himself set a shining example for the rest of the society to follow. He would define the moral values and set the virtuous standards in all walks of life, by himself leading others by example, for others to emulate him. Though he is not an aristocrat, he draws his political power from his moral values he cherishes and follows. He has political power in preference to other people who might be having more education and wealth. Trained in their education and practised in their moral virtues, they are the ideal gentlemen of society. Thus, the ultimate aim of Cooper is to set up moral standards in his social novels through his ideal characters, as Natty Bumppo, Uncas, Judge Temple and Hetty. This is the main import of his imagination, to set up universal moral standards and social order through his ideal personages. This is his contribution to the American character of the nineteenth century.

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## 5.4 LET US SUM UP

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Thus, we have seen that Cooper's imagination all along, from his first work in *The Spy* to his last work in the *Deerslayer*, is instructed by a particular moral vision, that is, a Christian way of life. These moral values are focussed through the character of a Christian gentleman, who is generally the protagonist. He plays a pivotal role in rallying the society in achieving all-round welfare. Collective goodness is his goal. The Leatherstocking hero, in his own unique ways, though without reformative zeal, is a shining example of these "essential" values of the Christianity, though he consciously believes that he is a man without a holy cross. Thus, Cooper's creative imagination is implicitly moralistic, as it is the case with all great masters of the world.

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## 5.5 QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss the Cooper's moral concern in his social novels.
2. How does the landscape evoke the feelings of piety in his Leatherstocking tales?
3. Discuss Cooper's moral vision in his canon.

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## 5.6 SUGGESTED READING

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Donald A. Ringe *James Fenimore Cooper*, NY: Tawyne Publishers, 1962.

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David Hirsch *Reality and Idea in the Early American Novel*, Mauton, 1971.

Geoffrey Rans *Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels*, University of North Carolina Press, 1991.