CHAPTER I

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS: EPIC OF VIRGIN SOIL

The pseudo-Shakespearean novel in eighteenth century England was dramatic and imposed certain mechanical patterns on prose narrative. With the advent of the New Comedy a new genre was introduced which allowed a mingling of history and fiction. It "was bred with the Romantic myth of the past to produce the historical romance,.... The historical romance is the 'cleanest' of all sub-genres of the novel thus far, the creation of a selfconscious attempt to redeem fiction at once for respectability and masculinity." The historical romance was introduced and developed in England by Scott and transferred and adapted to the American soil by Simms and Cooper. It was Simms, who in the preface of his Yemassee wrote, "The modern Romance is the substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic." During this period of the nineteenth century the major controversy amongst critics centered on the distinction between the novel and romance. One

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2 Ibid., p. 160.
aspect, however, that was accepted was that "epicness was considered one of the distinguishing features of romance." 

The American novel of the early nineteenth century did not deal with the themes of tragedy and comedy of human life, which had been the main content of literature in England. By the early nineteenth century the Romantics in England had started writing about the hero who would transcend society to achieve fulfillment. The distinguishing feature of the Romantics was their love for Nature. For Byron, Nature served as a background against which human actions were performed. In his heroes we meet men of adventure; Manfred, Childe Harold, Don Juan who are daring and undaunted fighters. In America, it was easy to deal with the romantic vision of a self-made man transcending conventions, as here the influence and presence of nature was all encompassing. The West was grand in its expansiveness, enigmatic in the purity of its yet unexplored virgin land. "The soaring faith of the American romantic affirmed the ability of the average citizen to rise above his personal weaknesses and the traditions and institutions of his European ancestors because, in the United States, every individual was in close contact with nature; the West was

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A limitless national reservoir of spiritual strength. A study of the American culture of the nineteenth century would be incomplete if it overlooked the myth of the West. Lewis in, The American Adam, has projected the American belief in the redemptive influence of nature. Lewis concluded that the distinguishing feature of the American novel was its acceptance of the myth of the West as its basis. American writers, beginning with Cooper, introduced heroes who had escaped from history, traditional society and lived amidst nature. Cooper was of the belief that a man amidst natural surroundings would be pure and would possess moral integrity. This vein of thought reflects that of Wordsworth who perceived in Nature a tranquility which fosters honesty and charity in man.

Till the nineteenth century, Nature was the most predominant attraction for Americans and a popular subject for American Romantics. This aspect allowed for Cooper's involvement in capturing the varied moods of the American wilderness and frontier. He often stops the action of his tales to narrate the beauty of the landscape. McAleer has rightly stated that "In nineteenth century America, few men resented more than James Fenimore Cooper the despoliation of

the wilderness." An important aspect of the West in Cooper's works is that it is neither perfectly virginal; as civilization is slowly creeping into its vicinities nor has it been completely corrupted by society. In the words of F.J. Turner, "American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." This development has economic as well as psychological implications. However, to say that the West is a place where man may unburden all his reservations and live a new and happy life is a myth, according to Turner. It is this myth that Cooper works upon in his frontier novels. He celebrates the myth of the Virgin Land. Cooper's deep involvement with the West gave his novels a truly national character so essential for the epic. As aptly conveyed in the words of Turner, "American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character." 

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Ibid., pp. 2-3.
Thus, we see the West had great relevance to American history. Its encompassing, widespread magnitude put it within close proximity to every American. That is why the West was dear to all Americans. For Cooper it offered an apt subject matter for his historical romances. It was Cooper's endeavour to write a great national prose epic. But, unlike Scott, he had no ancient national history to interpret. Cooper turned to the Westward movement, to the wilderness for a truly national subject. His genuine love for the wilderness made him creator of America's most memorable frontier sagas. In Cooper's novels we may perceive the manner of Scott, but the experiences and observations which Cooper narrates in the form of background and story are American. Not only did Cooper play an eminent role in shaping the novel of Romance in America, but also influenced "the general American attitude toward American institutions." The formation of the American Republic meant the displacement and obliteration of the American Indians. And Cooper was, in the words of Dekker, "the greatest advocate the American Indians ever had precisely because he was a great patriot - one whose love for his country embraced the continent as well as the nation, its past as well as its future." 

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It was Cooper's patriotic fervour that made him write endlessly and passionately idealizing the frontier. As Dekker has noted, "in Cooper's mind American nationhood and the Westward Movement... were intimately connected: each new clearing furnished a sign of the increasing temporal greatness of the nation...." The Last of the Mohicans is a serious historical narrative which like the ancient epic deals with events of great importance to a race or nation, that is, the colonization of the West in the history of America. Frank Norris wrote in his article 'A Neglected Epic' about the winning of the West as "the last great epic event in the history of civilization" worthy of comparison with the events that were celebrated in the Odyssey and the Song of Roland.

In order to fully grasp the fiction of Cooper it is necessary to understand the close relation between the characters of his narratives and his social and political thinking. He was a Democrat and believed in the institution of individual leadership. He did not approve of the oligarchy which ruled in England during the American Revolution. He believed in an organized society ruled by a head, like the

society in which he himself had grown up. He had seen his father who as a landlord treated his tenants justly, being not only the land owner but also the Judge of the County. The mixed elements of this feudal organisation influenced him deeply. In many of his novels The Pioneers, Satanstoe, Home As Found he writes about the social and economic responsibilities of the landlord. His early impressions are clearly reflected in his novels. His childhood was spent on the shores of Ostego Lake, which is about a hundred and fifty miles from New York city. Here he came in to contact with frontier life and a few Indians.

During the lifetime of Cooper Jacksonian democracy was gaining wide national support. These democrats of the eighteen-thirties were keen on eradicating the influence of European culture in America and completing the task which began with the American Revolution. The Jacksonians advocated the preservation of the West. Noble writes, "Engaged in critical debate with the Jacksonians, it is not surprising that Cooper begins the life history of Leather Stocking, as Deerslayer, in the opening years of the crucial struggle between England and France for control of the Mississippi Valley."13 The English are represented by Leather Stocking who at first in The Deerslayer is shown innocent and living in harmony with

nature. But, as the English approach the West, they realize their path is beset with obstacles, that is, the French and the Indians, have to be overcome to gain their Paradise. It is when the English and French come to conquer the West from the Indians that tensions are triggered off. After the English defeated the French, the Indian stood between them and their conquest of the West. The Anglo-American culture as it advanced westward had to face the defenders of the Indian culture. After seventeen hundred and sixty, the Indian was seen eternally defiant and ferociously opposed to the spread of Anglo-American culture and civilization in the West. Cooper elaborated the point that a new independent nation would be established by severing cultural links with the British Empire. It would be without a national history and would be built on nature. It is in the Mississipi Valley that people create an idyllic society, a society based on nature, devoid of all complications and drawbacks.

The Last of The Mohicans, in the words of M.D. Butler dramatizes "the well-ordered process of historical change" whereby "a physical, masculine, red culture in the futureless bachelorhood of Uncas, Magua and Chingaçhgoook gives way to a more spiritual, more feminine, white culture represented by the promising union of Alice and Duncan."\(^{14}\) The novel is set around the Lake George region where the plot revolves around

a real historical event - the surrender of Fort William Henry to the French in seventeen hundred and fifty seven, and the eventual massacre of the British inspite of Montcalm's assurance of safe conduct.

The most significant symbolic event in the novel is the fall of Fort William Henry. The fort is conquered by the French, yet the war as a whole was won by the English. It was a war "waged" according to Cooper, "for the possession of a country that neither was destined to retain." This conveys the futility of the action. In the words of M.D. Butler, "Characters take what turn out to be fruitless precautions; they lay out and follow what prove to be foolish plans. They put faith in empty authorities, practice useless skills. Nearly all of them end the novel dead or isolated in the wilderness." This aspect adds yet another level to the multi-leveled and complex themes of the book. Not only is the process of historical change, which brought about the creation of the American narrated, but also the chaos, violence, and pathos of rivalries and war, which in Cooper's

15 James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of The Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757 (New York : Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), p.3. All subsequent quotations from the novel are from this edition and will be indicated by initials LOM and a page number in parentheses.

16 Michael D. Butler, p. 117.
view were futile. After the fall of Fort William Henry, Munro becomes a symbol of the decaying power of Britain. He wanders about the second half of the book, mortified and dishonoured. His slow destruction is necessary and in keeping with the process of historical change, as the primitive must be destroyed to give way to the newly intruding white culture. This is where the significance of Duncan comes in. As the power of Munro declines, Duncan's prominence is increasingly felt. In the process he is transformed from a dependent, Anglo-American to an independent, self-reliant American. Throughout the second part of the novel, Duncan gradually obliterates illusions and artificiality to give way to practical handling of situations. In the first volume he is shown proud, but in the second he plays the fool to save Alice. His flexibility reveals certain American talents.

The action of the novel moves towards the central event, the massacre at Fort William Henry. Cooper revolves his adventure, romance and domestic novel around this event, allowing his fertile imagination to express its genius freely, yet restricting it to the proximity of the historical event. We see Alice sitting on her father's lap, we see her chiding Heyward for neglecting his chivalrous duty of paying more attention to her, we see Heyward impressing us with his efficiency as an officer; these scenes bring us to the world of the domestic novel. Then we see Heyward asking Munro for the hand of Alice and it is at this point we are brought back to the world of the historical novel where race and colour are a reality and affect the culture and future of a nation.
However, at the specific historic event at Fort William Henry, Natty, Uncas and Chingachgook are nowhere to be seen as Cooper realized that these fictional characters did not have any historical existence. Cooper "respects... historical fact, something different in kind from the fiction he is inventing around it. He has contributed much to the conventions and strategies of what we call historical fiction; his characters of romance move easily and often meaningfully against a generalized historical backdrop; but he shies away from involving them in specific historical events. They are, in a sense, of history without being in it." 17

The five books comprising The Leather Stocking Tales, namely: The Pioneers, The Last of The Mohicans, The Prairie, The Pathfinder and Deerslayer have been aptly described by D.H. Lawrence as, "the Leather Stocking books are lovely. Lovely half-lies.

They form a sort of American Odyssey, with Natty Bumppo for Odysseus." 18 The Last of The Mohicans was the most popular of the series, and even after a century of its publication was one of the American novels which gained international recognition and fame.

It is in keeping with the epic tradition and specifically in the vein of the *Aeneid* that Cooper writes about a particular historic event. In *The Last of The Mohicans* he writes about the historic conquest of Fort William Henry just as Virgil in the *Aeneid* dealt with the Civil War between Caesar and Pompey. Through the adventures of Aeneas, Virgil was able to outline a whole pattern of culture; *The Last of The Mohicans* too depicts the civilization and culture of a particular era. The historical implications did not curb Cooper's love for romance, sentiment and melodrama. We find two young ladies, Alice and Cora, leaving the camp of General Webb at Fort Edward to meet their old father, Munro who is commanding Fort William Henry on Lake George, which is at a distance of about fifteen miles. According to history, the Iroquois supported the British and the Hurons sided with the French. As the Iroquois were not suited for the villain's role, Cooper replaced them with a related tribe; the Mingoes. But, Cooper could not let Hawkeye fight along with forces that were to be driven away. So, he let Hawkeye, Uncas and Chingachgook be allies of the British and the Mingoes. So, Cooper makes them official allies, while remaining personal enemies. When Hawkeye is told that Heyward has employed a Mingo as guide, he says, "They are a thievish race, ... you can never make anything of them but skulls and vagabonds" (LOM, p. 31). There is not only war, but intrigues and rivalries among the Indian tribes. The intrusion of the European armies makes it more chaotic. They impose their interests on the traditional relations
amongst the tribes, "thus throwing everything into disorder," Natty complains, "and destroying all the harmony of warfare" (LOM, p. 204).

The characters of Uncas and Cora personify an aspect of history, too. Their death reflects the future which will gradually ease out the Indians, giving way to the white man and his civilization. In the beginning of the book the Indians are prominent figures, but gradually the white characters begin to become more prominent, emblematic of what was happening historically in the process of colonial expansion. Even though the novel is placed accurately in a particular moment of history, we feel the scenes have a dream like quality. The scenic beauty, the forests with mythic caves like that of Charles Brockden Brown have an aura of romance. According to Fiedler the woods seem out of the world as there are no ants shown, nor do mosquitoes bite. The girls look fresh and pretty inspite of having no soap or powder to maintain themselves. The Indians talk "like mythic Celts out of Ossian," and "Natty himself like an improbable blend of stage provincial, backwoods preacher, and instinctive sage."19 We are in a better position to truly appreciate The Last of The Mohicans once we stop searching for reality and read it as a myth depicting the New World. Cooper wrote about certain aspects of human experience which are cultural as well as personal. He bestowed upon these experiences great significance allowing them to enter into the

19 Leslie Fiedler, p. 198.
realm of myth. His mythic treatment of the conquering of the West and his imaginative creation of characters had great impact on the nineteenth century thinkers, writers and on society. The myth of the Leather Stocking saga became intricately woven into the matrix of American society.

The society that Cooper presents in *The Last of The Mohicans* is one that has degenerated. Natty being a mythical representation of the fall of the American Adam; the white men who came to conquer and live in a Paradise have in the very process debased themselves. The fall of Man is conveyed by Cooper's description of the altered landscape surrounding Fort William:

> The curling and spotless mists, which had been seen sailing above the hills towards the north, were now returning in an interminable dusky sheet, that was urged along by the fury of a tempest. The crowded mirror of the Horican was gone; and, in its place, the green and angry waters lashed the shores, as if indignantly casting back its impurities to the polluted strand....

> 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 the relief of any shadowing (LOM, p.186).

Milder has described the above passage as depiction of "the world as it is when the imagination has ceased to function. Through their behaviour in the New World, Cooper implies, men have cast a blight not upon nature (which has been blighted since Adam) but upon their own power to remake
the world through vision. By force of arms and perhaps by
historical necessity, white men will appropriate the New
World for themselves, but the society they establish will
be void of those virtues which have their source in the
'supernal influence' of the imagination and which are
needed to temper and sanctify the mundane human arrangements
of government, property and law."20 Thus Cooper by way of
mythical allusions presents us with originally conceived
ideas on the life of man and of their implications for the
future which is of relevance to American civilization as a
whole; endowing The Last of The Mohicans with a vital epic
dimension. Williams observes that the "larger, national
meaning of Cooper's works derives from a technique of 'synecdoche'
through which a local and sometimes trivial conflict is trans­
formed into a metaphor for the past, present or future of
America itself."21

One of Cooper's greatest achievements was the
creation of the hero of his Leather Stocking Tales: Natty
Bumppo. Natty was the mythical representation of the
philosophy which described America in terms of nature and
Europe in terms of history. The hero of Cooper's tales

20 Robert Milder, "The Last of The Mohicans and the New World
Fall,"American Literature, 52, No.3 (November, 1980),
p. 425.
21 John P. McWilliams, Political Justice in a Republic (Berkeley:
plays a unifying role. In *The Pioneers* he strives to unite the English and American cultures which have wrested away his freedom. It is through history that this myth is defined. Natty's simple way of life seems to be a means of combating the growing materialism and corruption in American society. Here Natty has symbolic significance which adds to his epic stature.

Natty is shown to be a saint with a gun. He has often been compared to Christ. The ancient epics abounded in gods and goddesses. In keeping with this tradition Cooper bestows upon Natty certain characteristics that present him as being more God-like than human. He is depicted Christ-like in love for his brethren. Natty is the embodiment of virtue; and all other characters are good or bad in relation to him. Critics have discerned a tragi-comic aspect in his character. This aspect allows him to fall in the category of epic heroes like Don Quixote. The comic element in his character is evident in, for example, his ignorance of the law (*The Pioneers*), as well as in his name. About his surname Natty says in *The Deerslayer*, "Bumppo has no lofty sound, I admit; and yet men have bumped through the world with it."²² Besides the humour, these lines depict Natty as the democratic

²²James Fenimore Cooper, *The Leather Stocking Saga*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), p. 79. All further quotations of this text are from this edition and will be indicated by initials LSS and a page number in parentheses.
American of humble origins. The tragic element is apparent in his realization that the frontier that he has loved and lived in for so many years is fast disappearing from North America and being a white man he is involved in the process of its obliteration. Another ancient epic hero with whom Natty may be compared is Odysseus. Like him Natty is widely travelled and is familiar with the customs of many peoples. Like Odysseus Natty too has a faithful dog, Hector who like the Homeric pet passes away just before his master.

Natty however is identified by Cooper as Adam. In the words of Lewis:

If there was a fictional Adamic hero unambiguously treated-celebrated in his very Adamism – it was the hero of Cooper's The Deerslayer: a self reliant young man who does seem to have sprung from nowhere and whose characteristic pose... was the solitary stance in the presence of nature and God....

The evolution of the hero as Adam in the fiction of the New World... begins rightly with Natty Bumppo. I call such a figure the hero in space, in two senses of the word. First, the hero seems to take his start outside time... and, second, his initial habitat is space as spaciousness, as the unbounded, the area of total possibility....

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Natty lives in the forest, away from the corrupting influences of society, in order to retain his purity. He does not marry, and to that extent is not a complete being. He is able to find no Eve to complement his innocent purity and remains wedded to the forest. In such surroundings Cooper's Adamic hero leads men who are rooted in historical time through the forests of the West. Cooper seems to be conveying a moral to the American people. The Pathfinder says, "What a creature is a mortal man! Never satisfied with his own gifts, but forever craving that which Providence denies!" (LSS, p.540). Here he represents the typical American who longs to live with nature. Natty was a means by which Cooper was able to embody the various myths of America as well as be the mouthpiece for his philosophy regarding contemporary American issues. Thus, we see that Cooper's ambition to write a great national prose epic was accomplished in the form of the Leather Stocking Tales.

It is obvious throughout that Natty was conceived by Cooper as a poet. His intimacy and reverence for nature make him give vent to some of the greatest truths which give birth to poetry as they are honest sentiments. "By speakin';" insists Natty, "I don't mean, chatterin'... but comin' out with... honest, deepest feelin's, in proper words" (LSS, p. 204). All such utterance is poetic as it rings of sincerity. Natty's intimacy with nature is further re-iterated when he says,"listened to all the sounds of the
woods for thirty years, as a man will listen, whose life and death depend on the quickness of his ears" (LOM, p. 58).

These lines point to the importance of sound in *The Last of The Mohicans*, not only the sound of danger, but even the sound of music is significant. The main source of music is Gamut, who provides comic relief in an atmosphere ridden with tension. He tries to help attain peace and harmony by singing the praise of the Lord. When Alice, Cora and Gamut sing in a group at Glenn's Falls as it would be a "friendly manner of saying good night," it has a significant effect on Natty whose "roving eyes began to moisten, and before the hymn was ended, scalding tears rolled out of fountains that had long seemed dry, and followed each other down those cheeks, that had oftener felt the storms of heaven than any testimonials of weakness" (LOM, p. 54). Not only is music the means by which man can express his reverence for God, but it also has the power to facilitate emotional and affectionate reciprocation between men.

In keeping with the Adamic purity of nature Deerslayer says, "Hurt nothing unless you're forced to." However, in *The Last of The Mohicans* Natty emerges as Hawkeye. He is a soldier who will fight and kill to clear the way for the gaining of Paradise. The view, or rather the dream of the Americans that the European character will be redeemed by the Paradise to be found in the American continent, is a myth. The English also noted that by
approaching the frontier they would be able to escape from their evil and experienced souls and attain a fresh innocence in Eden (symbolised by the West). Cooper felt this was a myth and expresses this by making Leather Stocking as myth serve reality and history and lose his innocence through time. Here is present the myth of the white American. He is basically a hard-hearted loner, living away from civilization. Living in harmony with nature, Natty remains uncorrupted by society, representing the myth of the American Adam. But, when as Hawkeye he is shown as a calm and efficient killer we see this myth being destroyed.

Cooper shows Hawkeye and Chingachgook sharing a close relationship based on deep love and comradeship. They both have an intense love for the wilderness and live amid nature. It is only here, Cooper seems to be saying that men of different races can live in harmony. Natty as myth stands for the Christian Noble Man and Chingachgook as the Pagan Noble Savage. As explained by Fiedler, "Two mythic figures have detached themselves from the texts of Cooper's books and have entered the domain of our dreams: Natty Bumppo, the hunter and enemy of cities; and Chingachgook, nature's nobleman and Vanishing American. But these two between them postulate a third myth, an archetypal relationship which also haunts the American psyche: two lonely men, one dark-skinned, one white, bend together over a carefully
guarded fire in the virgin-heart of the American wilderness..."^25

Once the English and French come to conquer the West away from the Indians then even Natty and Chingachgook are no longer able to retain their innocence. Chingachgook is compelled to fight for the English, along with Natty. Natty is presented before us at three of the novels most important levels, that of history, symbol and myth. He is at once a local and national character on the historical plane of the narrative, a universal and representative man on the symbolic plane and a cosmic figure on the level of myth, thus fully signifying his epic role.

Natty is the unifying factor, in the Leather Stocking Tales and is their hero. In The Last of The Mohicans this stature is usurped by Uncas. Now we see Uncas carrying on the myth of the American Adam. He maintains the innocence which is lost by his father and Natty in joining the armed forces. In The Last of The Mohicans during the first journey Uncas's role is important but secondary. Even during initial stages of the second journey he is over enthusiastic and Natty (as Hawkeye) corrects him more than once. However, after that his stature gradually rises. He interprets the trial which even Hawkeye finds difficult. He is able to "read a language

^25Leslie Fiedler, p. 187.
that would prove too much for the wisest of them all!" (LOM, p. 203). Twice when the trial appears to be lost, Uncas finds crucial clues after which Hawkeye is able to say with confidence, "I can now read the whole of it" (LOM, p. 225) and progress is "no longer delayed by uncertainty" (LOM, p. 227). "Uncas lacks nothing in the way of bravery, manliness, and an Indian thirst for battle. In the forest he repeatedly displays greater perception than either his father or Leather Stocking; in battle he is athletic and fearless." Cooper enhances his heroic stature as in the gauntlet scene he stands "erect and firm" and prepares "to meet his fate like a hero" (LOM, p. 248). When he is abused by the Huron women he does not condescend to reply but reacts in "an attitude in which dignity was singularly blended with disdain" (LOM, p. 250). He looks at the young man who brandishes a tomahawk at his face, "with an expression that was superior to contempt" (LOM, p. 251).

Uncas belongs to a superior race of pure, unmixed blood. Though in his manners and ideas he is 'mixed'. He treats Cora as a white lover would. He attends to the sisters and reacts sympathetically when they are reunited after one of the rescues, elevating him, "far above the intelligence, and advanced him probably centuries before the practices of his nation" (LOM, p. 115). When Uncas is recognised by

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26 Terence Martin, p. 227.
Magua, his presence creates a sensation among the Hurons; "it was many minutes before their meaning eyes ceased to roll towards their captive in curious examination of a warrior who had so often proved his prowess on the best and proudest of their nation" (LOM, p. 261). Darnell pointing out the significance of this sentence writes, "Cooper here has given Uncas a history, a legend", so essential to the epic hero. Chingachgook and Uncas belong to a tribe which was one of the first to be dispossessed by the encroaching colonists. Uncas is "the last of the Mohicans", he is prophetic for his race, and before he dies he is recognised as hereditary chief of the Delawares, which is the tribe next in line to the Mohicans. Uncas leading an expedition against the Hurons has a definite epic character. It is a "war of the nation" (LOM, p. 339), and affects everything in the vicinities and horizons; "The sounds of the battle were over, and they (The Lenape) had fed fat their ancient grudge, and had avenged their recent quarrel with the Mengwe, by the destruction of a whole community. The black and murky atmosphere that floated around the spot where the Hurons had encamped, sufficiently announced, of itself, the fate of that wandering

tribe* (LOM, p. 360). The culminating point is the funeral scene where the glorification of Uncas is at its highest pitch. In this scene Uncas achieves true tragic stature. It is a tragic scene with elements of epic and myth. Tamenund ties the fate of the Delaware tribe to the fate of Uncas, "Men of the Lenape!" he said, in hollow tones that sounded like a voice charged with some prophetic mission. "The face of the Manitou is behind a cloud! His ears are shut; His tongue gives no answer. You see Him not; yet His judgements are before you. Let your hearts be open and your spirits tell no lie. Men of Lenape!. The face of the Manitou is behind a cloud" (LOM, p. 362). Terence Martin has called this scene:

The most powerful effect in the novel,... History has given way to legend, manners to ritual. At times clumsily, at times adventitiously, Cooper has taken us in The Last of The Mohicans from conventional romance to a moment of history which, by means of violence and atrocity, burns itself to ruins. Then, with all the preparations made, he has led us from the ruins of history to mourn the death of Uncas in the most exalted world of romance of which he was capable. And in the course of all this he has managed to uncover issues and concerns which are of startling relevance to all American (and human) experience both in his time and ours28.

28 Terence Martin, p. 229.
Thus, we see the elements of history, myth, legend, tragedy and epic fuse in the funeral scene. For such equivalent excellence one will have to go back to Beowulf and Roland. Just as in The Iliad Priam along with a few remaining members of his tribe mourns the death of Hector, Chingachgook in The Last of The Mohicans mourns the death of his son, Uncas who is the last of the tribe; "As for me", intones the solitary Chingachgook, "the son and the father of Uncas, I am a blazed pine, in a clearing of the pale-faces. My race has gone from the shores of the salt lake, and the hills of the Delawares" (LOM, p. 371).

Cooper was successful in creating Hawkeye and Uncas as personages of truly epic-heroic proportions. Fighting against them is Magua. He is a cowardly and base character. He is a drunkard who cheats and betrays people. He is presented as a foil to the virtuous Uncas. He competes with Uncas for the love of Cora. As the novel reads on his stature is enhanced, and is suggestive of being an image of Satan. He is conceived in epic proportions by Cooper. He is Cooper's 'Prince of Darkness' just as Satan is Milton's 'ruler of the infernal fires.' Magua like Satan is an orator par excellence. His death is heroic expressed in Miltonic tones, "Turning a relentless look on his enemy, he shook a hand in grim defiance. But his hold loosened, and his dark person was seen cutting the air with its head downwards, for a fleeting instant, until it glided past the
fringe of shrubbery which clung to the mountain, in its rapid flight to destruction” (LOM, p. 359). Magua's pursuit of Cora has about it a quality of hatred and revenge that gives the villain the characteristics of a legendary foe. Cooper suggests this legendary identification in appropriate language in the battle scene, "Still Magua, though daring and much exposed, escaped from every effort against his life, with that sort of fabled protection that was made to overlook the fortunes of favored heroes in the legends of ancient poetry" (LOM, p. 355-56). The climax is reached in the epic confrontation between Uncas and Magua. Symbolically, it seems to be a struggle between good and evil:

With the novel's stage so perfectly set for epic combat, Cooper creates one of his most strikingly dramatic scenes, in which Magua kills the wounded Uncas and then plummets a thousand feet to his own death after having been shot by Hawkeye. The scene has all the (spatial) coherence and the (temporal) inevitability of the conclusion of the tragic epic.... the novel implicitly states that such epic action is no longer possible in the modern world - a world in which warfare is conducted by masses of indistinguishable soldiers and their destructive engines. Only the past, Cooper seems to say, can provide the context for true heroism.

It is significant that Uncas is killed by Magua. Magua is a personification of the Indians hatred for the English man. After the defeat of the French, the English have to fight the Indian before they can conquer the West. By then the myth of the Noble Savage symbolised by Uncas will be wiped out by the cruel savage, Magua. Here we see a coinciding point between myth and history. The Indian, like Magua, defends his way of life, flinging abuses and tomahawks at the white man who invades their home.

Magua, the villain of the romance has historical significance. He was by birth, "a chief and a warrior among the red Hurons of the lakes" (LOM, p. 100), and had been living a contented life for twenty years till the white man, "came into the woods, and taught him to drink the fire-water, and he became a rascal" (LOM, p. 100). After this he was rusticated from his tribe and he joined their enemies, the Mohawks. Later, he joined the English against the French. He was under the command of Munro, where again he indulged in heavy drinking and was, "tied up before all the palefaced warriors, and whipped like a dog" (LOM, p. 101). For this humiliation he blamed Munro, who had ordered the flogging, and the white man in general, and planned to take revenge on them. Magua, through his personal life history and quest for revenge recapitulates in microcosm the entire history of his race, bestowing upon the novel additional epic qualities.
Writing about history and dealing with issues of social import to contemporary America was one aspect of The Last of The Mohicans. This alone would not have insured recognition for the work of Cooper, who like Scott, desired popularity for his narratives. In the early nineteenth century, writing in the vein of the "captivity narrative" rescues, tortures of women and children saturated with violence was popular with the public and was of commercial value. By the time Cooper wrote The Last of The Mohicans violence was linked to life in the West. There was intense hatred between the Indian and the white man. Cooper, of course, being deeply in love with the frontier, transcended time and race and idealized the American Indian. So, in writing The Last of The Mohicans Cooper had to reconcile the beauty, the grandeur of the West, the innate bravery and goodness of the Indian with the barbarous crimes committed by Indians which were cruel and obscene. This he did by bestowing upon women a significant role in the advancement of the adventure. Alice and Cora are the cause of a lot of violence in the course of their passage through the forest where they do not really belong. They play a central role in keeping with the captivity adventures written in Cooper's times. "The fatherland abandoned... only the mother

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remained as symbol of an authority that was one with love" for the "fatherless" American 31. This special significance granted to women is apparent in most nineteenth century American writing. It was women who, in these adventures suffered to a great degree causing at the same time a large amount of destruction in the wilderness. Their very presence bespeaks of disharmony. As Natty says, "It would not be the act of men to leave such harmless things to their fate, even though it breaks up the harboring place forever" (LOM, p.40). These lines echo those of Milton's Paradise Lost where Adam in Empson's words says, "It spoils everything to have women about, and why should God saddle us with them?" 32.

Even though Cooper's view of society is patriarchal in ethics, he realized that a society depicted without women would be incomplete. There may be relationships like those of Natty and Chingachgook but these were of no social significance. Nina Baym, narrating the significance of women in Cooper's novels writes, "With women, there are classes, societies, civilization" 33. We see the women Cora

31 Leslie Fiedler, p. 49.


and Alice in *The Last of The Mohicans* not only as embodiments of different races, but the entire movement of the story depends upon their safe passage, through the wilderness. It is in this process that we are made aware of the terrors of the forest, the bravery and chivalry of Uncas and Natty, the timidity of Alice, the courage of Cora, the villainy of Magua. We experience some moments of great suspense and horror of Indian warfare and dangerous rivalry. Thus, Cooper writing in the tradition of captivity romances achieves an epic quality by being representative of the civilization prevalent in a particular era, that is, of nineteenth century America.

Alice and Cora symbolise the power of the white woman. They possess attractive qualities which enslave men and control their actions. The noble Cora is symbolic of more than merely a being who evokes passions. She is debased even before she was born, her mother was "a lady... descended, remotely, from that unfortunate class who are so basely enslaved" making her a racial outcast and is to Munro, "a curse entailed on Scotland by her unnatural union with a foreign and trading people" (*LOM*, p. 162). Here Cora is symbolic of the injustice done to the Negro. This unjust slavery prevalent among the European colonists in the Old World threatens to corrupt the New World, that is, America. Even the history of Magua and Chingachgook symbolises the injustice inflicted by the white man on the
Indian, depicting again the destructive European influence on the New World.

Cora has mixed blood as she is daughter of Munro's first wife, whose family had negro blood in its history. Heyward is shown to be prejudiced against her and when Munro points it out he denies it; "Heaven protect me from a prejudice so unworthy of my reason!" returned Duncan, at the same time conscious of such a feeling, and that as deeply rooted as if it has been ingrafted in his nature" (LOM, p. 162). Cora herself refers to this prejudice when in the beginning of the book she says about their Indian guide, "Should we distrust the man because his manners are not our manners, and that his skin is dark?" (LOM, p. 12).

We realize, as the book reads on, that not only is prejudice inter-racial but also prevalent among the various tribes of Indians living in the frontier forests. In this aspect we see that Cooper imbibed much from the ancient epic writer of The Iliad, in the underlying framework of his novel. The Iliad deals with the conflict between the Greeks and the Trojans, over an attractive and desired woman. Correspondingly, in The Last of The Mohicans we meet the Mingoes and their sworn enemies, the Delawares, there is also Cora; the coveted woman.

In Cooper's view, though prejudice is cruel and senseless, yet it is a reality and prevalent wherever and
whenever different racial groups are brought together. Cooper allows Uncas to fall in love with Cora thereby exonerating himself of any racial prejudice. But, then reality in the form of history steps in, and both of them cannot be united. Cooper seems to be inclined to agree with Natty’s reaction on the occasion of the funeral of Uncas and Cora, “But when they spoke of the future prospects of Cora and Uncas, he shook his head, like one who knew the error of their simple creed…” (LOM, p.365).

“The uniting of Uncas and Cora would have resulted in a new race of North Americans, which could never have been a reality. A sense of racial doom in present in this novel” the culmination of which is seen in the funeral scene. All the events seem to lead to this point. This allows a structural similarity between *The Last of The Mohicans* and *Paradise Lost*. They both work in the direction of an apparent climax. Both conclude leaving the reader with a sense of loss.

Fiedler writes that, “Though Cooper’s own 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 offspring of one unnatural marriage to enter into another alliance that crossed race lines:”

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34 George Dekker, p. 72.
This serious epic has not only "national but hemispheric significance the question of the relations between men of different race in the New World". In Cooper's view, the way of resolving the problem of race relations lies in deep bonds of friendship like that of Natty and Chingachgook. They are men of different races and their companionship is of central importance in *The Leather Stocking Tales* and is Cooper's great contribution to world literature. The potential solution to injustice and prejudice lies in reconciliation based upon equality, as represented by their deep friendship. As described by D.H. Lawrence, Cooper in his immortal friendship of Chingachgook and Natty dreamed the "nucleus of a new society, the clue to a new world epoch" the "two childless, womanless men, of opposite races. They are the abiding thing.... This is the new great thing, the clue, the inception of a new humanity.".

Writing on the three major interracial relationships in the novel between Natty and Chingachgook, Cora and Uncas, Alice and Heyward, Dekker says, "We are certainly meant to view them in terms of broad national and historical perspectives.... Cora's ability to confront the hardships and dangers of aboriginal North America is frequently stressed;".

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35 Leslie Fiedler, pp. 205, 200.
36 D.H. Lawrence, pp. 44, 48.
so too is Uncas's freedom from the less noble characteristics of his people, particularly the Indian attitude towards women. What the union of these two promised, then, was a true marriage of the Old and New Worlds—one which would allow North America to retain its essential character and not become so many fake New Yorks, Nova Scotias, New Englands. Cooper approved of the match of Alice and Heyward as they would marry and breed children of the pure white race. Cora's death is meant to convey the gradual exclusion of the Negro from American society. Another aspect that is indicated with the passing away of Cora is the virtue of Christian idealism. Alice and Heyward, the survivors are of mediocre virtue. So, "Though the New World will pass from the Indians to the British and from the British to the Americans, the society whose progenitors are Heyward and Alice will be one of middling virtue which will perpetuate, even in its new republican form, the sins bequeathed to it from Europe. Politically it will be a nation unlike others, but it will be a nation nonetheless, not a New World paradise."

In keeping with the ambitiousness of his intent, Cooper relies heavily on vital national issues and events

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37 George Dekker, p.73.
38 Robert Milder, p.428.
and is able to represent a microcosmic image of America. These make it an epic representative of contemporary America. Cooper took up the theme of race relations at a time when it was of special significance for the American novelists. It was during the early nineteenth century that the resettlement of Indians was taking place. At this point of time the red-white relations were bitter. In the words of Joel Porte, "This national mood must have contributed significantly to awakening Cooper's profound interest in race, which is certainly one of his great themes." Cooper writes about the question of race seen from the Indian point of view. In *The Last of the Mohicans* Magua represents not only the redskins attitude but also justifies his own villainous conduct:

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 their slaves. He gave this people the nature of the pigeon: wings that never tire; young, more plentiful than the leaves on the trees, and appetites to devour the earth. He gave them tongues like the false call of the wild-cat; hearts like rabbits: the cunning of the hog.... With his tongue, he stops the ears of the Indians; his heart teaches him to pay warriors to fight his battles; his cunning tells him how to get together the goods of the earth; and his arms enclose the land from the shores of the salt-water to the islands of the great lake. His gluttony makes him sick. God gave him enough, and yet he wants all. Such are the pale faces (LOM, p. 318).

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39 Joel Porte, p. 9.
Magua goes on to say; "Some the Great Spirit made with skins brighter and redder than yonder sun... and these did He fashion to His own mind.... They were brave; they were just; they were happy" (LOM, p. 319). The above two passages prove Cooper's disgust with his own race about which he wrote at length. In *The Last of The Mohicans* Cooper seems to say that another possible solution to racial problems is by understanding the meaning of true Christian forgiveness. This is symbolised by Cora. She is the only character in the novel (beside David Gamut) who forgives readily and generously. She forgives Magua for his uncouth ferocious obscenity and the audacity of his proposal with a Christ like, "he knows not what he does" (LOM, p. 107). In the end, Cora "dies for her virtues, not her sins is the price America must pay for its willful transgressions: and Cooper, while honoring Cora's value, stands ready to pay for it. It is as if he knew that America had not only sinned but must continue to sin in order to preserve the limited but real good its agrarian republic represented.\(^\text{40}\).

The theme of *The Last of The Mohicans*, says Dekker, is "racial relations in North America - explored here for the first time in American fiction.... Cooper's characters are usually representative of a class-national,\(^\text{40}\) Robert Milder, p. 429.
regional, racial or social - and therefore their relations with each other are both individual and representative."

Dekker further adds that in *The Last of The Mohicans*, "Cooper is dealing with the relations between the three main races then inhabiting North America, and testing the possibility of their being brought together in a harmonious union." However, the theme does not restrict itself to the American nation and history alone, but, has universal significance concerning the life of man. The problem of racial relations is of relevance for us today as well. Thereby, bestowing upon the novel the epic dimension of being at once timeless and temporal. The themes from racial prejudice, miscegenation to the extermination of a particular race are all universally relevant. However, the universality of the themes does not prohibit the novel from being representative of the civilization of a particular era. In this aspect Cooper seemed to agree with Richard Chase in, "the power of the epic, to mirror the soul of a people."

Most of the characters and events in the novel, we are made to realize by the end, embody some universal truth in keeping with the epic tradition. The novel is

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41 George Dekker, pp. 67, 68.

less a narrative of particular events than the illustration of universal principles. On the level of violence, which seems apparently meaningless, is demonstrated the process of historical change. The developments of this change are embodied in a Virgilian compression of events of two to three weeks duration. The pursuit, torture and blood shed are heavy borrowings from Gothic Romance. The structure based on an adventure story, saturated with chaos and violence is the vehicle of a well defined argument of national significance, that is, the decline of the Indian, and European and consequent emergence of the American.

In The Last of The Mohicans Cooper makes use of Biblical analogies. These Biblical allusions are Cooper's experiments in symbolism. The vehicle for Cooper's views on the Bible is the English Connecticut Yankee, David Gamut. Cooper calls him, "worthy namesake of the Psalmist" (LOM, p. 54), "namesake of the Jewish Prince" (LOM, p. 82) and "single-minded disciple of the king of Israel" (LOM, p. 229). For David "the true spirit of Christianity" is "He that is to be saved, will be saved, and he that is predestined to be damned will be damned" (LOM, p. 116). This view is in direct contrast to that of Natty's who feels that the best knowledge is to be got from nature. "'Tis open before your eyes.... 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" (LOM, p. 117). The Christianity Natty acquires by living with nature is far superior to that of Gamut's Bible knowledge. This should not give an impression that Cooper was hostile to the teachings of the Bible, he only opposed those aspects of it which were liable to be dangerously misinterpreted by men. He approved wholeheartedly of 'love God and neighbour' yet believed that Bumppo living in close intimacy with nature would understand and practice these very teachings much more than a person living in a civilized, materialistic society.

In presenting the various themes of the novel, Cooper used a structure based on duality. There are two plots, two chases, two girls. This doubling is functional in depicting the themes of the narrative. The first plot ends in reunion, and the second, in keeping with the tragic epic, in death. Alice symbolises future civilization and Cora is the tainted coloured woman of the past. The first volume depicts civilized warfare seen in the massacre at Fort William Henry. The second volume presents the scene of epic combat based on Indian warfare. The dual structure and plot are a vehicle for the themes, unifying the entire
work as understood in R.S. Crane's sense as the immanent principle of structure which synthesise the various elements of the work and direct them towards a rhetorical end. 43

In The Last of The Mohicans the elements synthesised include: a historical setting, themes relating to miscegenation, various allusions to myth, all part of a chain of events which begin with Magua's intended revenge and end with the death of Uncas, Cora and Magua. The novel presents a panorama of symbolically significant characters and events with such vividness, which are a substitute for the mythological divinities in ancient epics, dealing with the theme of "cosmic harmony disturbed and distorted by the incorrigible perversity of man" (Tamenund's closing elegy).