CHAPTER- II
FIRST NOVEL OF \textit{LEATHERSTOCKING TALES}
\textit{THE PIONEERS: SOCIAL DEGRADATION OF THE INDIANS}

The idea that the American Indian was doomed to fade away wherever he came into contact with European settlers was certainly a well-established one in the early 19th Century. The principle reason for this belief aside from, in many circles, a good deal of wishful thinking was that, Indians seemed unwilling or unable to adapt successfully to the newly dominant European economic and social systems. Indians persisted on the fringes of settler culture. Their social degradation seemed all too obvious, because of their tendency towards alcoholism and as the numbers of Indians in settler-populated areas seemed to diminish rapidly. European superiority, and economic and social interests that furthered such beliefs certainly played an equally important part in this.

James Fenimore Cooper shared the view, even if he did not welcome it that co-habitation of Indian and the settlers was in the long run impossible. As he noted in \textit{Letter XXXIV of Notions of the Americans} (1828):

As a rule the red man disappears before the superior moral and physical influence of the White, just as I believe the black man will eventually do the same thing, unless he shall seek shelter in some other region. In nine cases out of ten, the tribes have gradually removed west, and there is now a confused
assemblage of Nations and languages collected on the immense hunting
grounds of the Prairies....

The ordinary manner of the disappearance of the Indian is by a removal deeper
into the forest. Still, many linger near the graves of their fathers, to which their
superstitions no less than a fine natural feeling lend a deep interest. The fate of
the latter is inevitable; they become victims of the abuses of civilization without
ever attaining to any of its moral elevation....(P, 25)

Cooper estimated that, in 1828, there were only some 120,000 Indians within the
then-limits of the United States, from Atlantic to Pacific. He endorsed a plan, which
he stated had been detailed by a recent report of the Indian Office, that Indians be
courage to migrate west of the Mississippi, where they should be given in
perpetuity a formal United States Territory, with the right to send delegates to
Congress:

If the plan can be effected there is reason to think that the constant diminution
of the numbers of the Indians will be checked, and that a race about whom
there is so much that is poetic and fine in recollection will be preserved.
Indeed some of the Southern tribes have already endured the collision with the
white man, and are still slowly on the increase. as one of these tribes, at least
(the Chicasaws) is included in this plan, there is just ground to hope that the
dangerous point of communication has been passed, and that they may
continue to advance in civilization to maturity....(P, 72)

Cooper wrote a great deal further, in his novels, about Indians, because had a
number of Indian friends, and his views towards them tended to mellow. While the
notion that Indians were doomed by fate to extinction proved, happily, not to be true.

The criticism of the theory should also recall that it was held in opposition to another
theory -- based originally on the Old Testament accounts of the destruction of the
Canaanites to make room for the Jews. This view considered the active extermination
of Indians to be a good thing, and blessed by God. It was one to which many well-
known Indian haters, such as Louis Cass and later Mark Twain, not to mention a large
portion of less educated and literate frontiersmen, gave either tacit or explicit
endorsement. Before the Europeans, or, to use a more significant term, the Christians,
dispossessed the original owners of the soil, all that section of the country which
contains the New England States and these of the Middle which lie east of the
mountains was occupied by two great nations of Indians, from whom had descended
numberless tribes. Since the original distinctions between these nations were marked
by a difference in language, as well as by repeated and bloody wars, they never were
known to amalgamate, until after the power and inroads of the whites had reduced
some of the tribes to a state of dependence that rendered not only their political, but,
considering the wants and habits of a savage, their animal existence also, extremely
precarious.

These two great divisions consisted, on the one side, of the Five, or as they were
afterwards called, the Six Nations, and their allies and, on the other, of the Lenni
Lenape, or Delawares, with the numerous and powerful tribes who owned that nation
as their grandfather. The former was generally called, by the Anglo-Americans,
Iroquois, or the Six Nations, and sometimes Mingois. Their appellation, among their
rivals, seems generally to have been the Mengwe, or Maqua. They consisted of the
tribes, or, as their allies were found of asserting, in order to raise their consequences,
of the several nations of the Mohawks, the Oneidas, the Onodagas, Cayugas, and
Senecas who ranked, in the confederation, in the order in which they are named. The Tuscaroras were admitted to this union, near a century after its formation, and thus completed the number to six.

Of the Lenni Lenape, or as they were called by the whites, from the circumstance of their holding their great council fire on the banks of that river, the Delaware nation, the principal tribes, besides who bore the generic name, were the Mahicanni, Mohicans, or Mohegans, and the Nanticokes, or Nebtogoes. Of these, the latter held the country along the waters of the Chesapeake and the seashore while the Mohegans occupied the district between the Hudson and the ocean, including much of New England. Of course, these two tribes were the first who were dispossessed of their lands by the Europeans. The wars of a portion of the latter were celebrated, as the wars of King Philip but the peaceful policy of William Penn, or Miquon, as he was termed by the natives, effected its object with less difficulty, though not with less certainty. As the natives gradually disappeared from the country of the Mohegans, some scattering families sought a refuge around the council fire of the mother tribe, or the Delawares. The people had been induced to suffer themselves to be called women, by their old enemies, the Mingoes, or Iroquois, after the latter having in vain tried the effects of hostility had recourse to artifice in order to prevail over their rivals. According to this declaration, the Delawares were to cultivate the arts of peace and to entrust their defense entirely to men, or warlike tribes of the Six Nations.

This state of things continued until the war of the revolution, when the Lenni Lenape formally asserted their independence, and fearlessly declared that they were again men. But in a government so peculiarly republican as the Indian polity, it was not at all times an easy task to restrain its members within the rules of the nation.
Several fierce and renowned warriors of the Mohegans, finding the conflicts with the whites to be in vain, sought a refuge with their grandfather and brought with them the feelings and principles that had so long distinguished them in their own tribe. These chieftains kept alive, in some measure, the martial spirit of the Delawares and would, at times, lead small parties against their ancient enemies, or such other foes as incurred their resentment. Among these warriors was one race particularly famous for their prowess, and for those qualities that render an Indian hero celebrated. But war, time, disease, and want had conspired to thin their number and the sole representative of this one renowned family now stood in the hall of Marmaduke Temple. He had for a long time been an associate of the white men, particularly in wars and having been, at a season when his services were of importance, much noticed and flattered, he had turned Christian, and was baptized by the name John. He had suffered severely in his family during the war, having had every soul to whom he was allied cut off by an inroad of the enemy and when the last, lingering remnant of his nation extinguished their fires, among the hills of the Delaware, he alone had remained, with a determination of laying his bones where his father had so long lived and governed.

*The Leatherstocking Tales* were examined, not simply as romances of a passing frontier, but as documents which partly helped to shape, political and social attitudes towards the Indians in the first half of the nineteenth century. Cooper did not create his fictional Indians wholly from his own imagination, nor from detailed, first-hand memories of real Indians. Rather, as Roy Harvey Pearce claims, he took them “as his culture gave them to him.” As a series, the novels span the period from the early 1740’s, when hostilities broke out between France and England, to 1805, when the United States was consolidating its hold on the newly purchased Louisiana Territory. Natty Bumppo, the linking character in all five novels, is known variously as
“Deerslayer,” “Hawkeye,” “Pathfinder,” “Leatherstocking,” and “The Trapper” in accordance with the different phases of his career. Bumppo lives on the frontier, apart from the civilization of his fellow whites, and associates most with Indians—some of whom he loves, trusts and befriends, and others of whom he dislikes, distrusts, and fights. In the internal chronology of the five tales, *The Deerslayer* comes first and tells of Natty’s entrance to manhood. Next, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Pathfinder* relate incidents from his mature life. The tale *The Pioneers* shows him when he is old but still agile and strong, while *The Prairie* tells of the infirmity but independence of his extreme old age and of his eventual death. Written about American frontier society in the secondary stage of development, *The Pioneers* is concerned only peripherally with Indian-white relations. The Indians have been dispossessed of their lands, and, apart from old Mohegan John, there are none left to arouse pity or censure, much less the fear, of the settlers. As Mohegan John himself says: “There will soon be no red-skin in the country. When John has gone, the last will leave these hills, and his family will be dead” (P, 407)

The settlers contend against the trees and birds which they see as obstacles to progress, even as an earlier generation of settlers had seen the Indians. In this situation, Judge Temple reveals his ambivalent attitude toward progress. Constantly he speaks for conversation. He warns his household against wanton destruction of the best trees for firewood. Along with Leatherstocking, he feels the waste involved in the mass slaughter of pigeons and in the seining of fish which will never be used. Against popular opinion, he is determined to enforce game laws which prohibit hunting out of season. At the same time, as the benevolent father figure of the settlement at Templeton, he looks forward to progress and development,
“To his eyes, where others saw nothing but a wilderness, towns, manufactories, bridges, canals, mines, and all the other resources of an old country were constantly presenting themselves.” (P, 324)

The moral conflict of the novel centers on Judge Temple's attempt to establish the principles of an abstract legal system in a territory where increasing population has rendered obsolete the old natural law as exemplified by Natty Bumppo. When he says to his daughter Elizabeth, "Laws alone remove us from the conditions of the savages" (387), Judge Temple not only shows the high regard in which he holds the law. He also reveals a fear that frontier society could degenerate to a state of savagery, and a determination that this should not happen. The establishment of law reflects the economic change by which the vague territory of the hunter is transformed into the surveyed fields of the farmer. Judge Temple is worried about the social degradation of his community.

The story depends on a case of mistaken identity. The hero, Edward Oliver Effingham, disguises himself as a hunter, and taking the name of Oliver Edwards, conceals the fact that he is the son of Judge Temple's closest friend. In his rightful person, Effingham has a strong moral claim to the thousands of acres which the Judge has been holding in trust since the War of Independence. Because Mohegan John has said that Edwards has the blood of a Delaware chief, it is assumed that he has Indian ancestry. In fact, his grandfather, Major Effingham, had been only an honourary member of the Delawares. Working on this false assumption, the Judge and his household—as well as the reader—consider references to Edwards' ownership of the land to be references to aboriginal title.
When Edwards refers to Leatherstocking's claim that the whites unjustly obtained the land from the Indians, the Judge dismisses the problem by referring it to the white man's law:

"The Indian title was extinguished so far back as the close of the old war i.e. the French and Indian War, 1754-1763; and if it had not been at all, I hold under the patents of the royal governors, confirmed by an act of our own State legislature, and no court in the country can affect my title" (P, 238). Edwards' own claim depends upon the extinction of the Indian title and upon royal patent. It does add, however, to the reader's and to the Judge's misunderstanding of the nature of Edwards' claim.

In a novel dealing with the establishment of abstract law, it is incongruous for a young, well-educated man, who gives no details of his life, to maintain a claim upon the land without one piece of supporting information beyond Mohegan's statement that he has the blood of a Delaware chief. Even within the novel there is no question but that the aboriginal title for this particular land had been extinguished; as Mohegan John says to Leatherstocking, "The land was owned by my people; we gave it to my brother, in council—to the Fire-eater; and what the Delawares give lasts as long as the waters run" (P, 294). On this basis, Judge Temple rebukes Edwards after the young man's passionate outburst about the rightful ownership of the land:

"Oliver Edwards, thou forgettest in whose presence thou standest. I have heard, young man, that thou claimest descent from the native owners of the soil; but surely thy education has been given thee to no effect, if it has not taught thee the validity of the claims that have transferred the title to the whites." (P, 349)
By placing the discussion of aboriginal land rights within the context of a comic mistaken identity situation, Cooper has denied, in a very effective manner, the seriousness of the problem. He has invalidated Natty Bumppo's concern for Indian rights by placing that concern within the context of Judge Temple's relationship with Oliver Edwards where it is irrelevant. Thomas Philbrick makes the interesting point that "By the end of the novel, Oliver is not only the legal heir to the estate which Judge Temple has held in trust for Edward Effingham, but symbolically he is the inheritor of the Indian's moral claim to the land"(P, 349). Thus the dynamic of the novel suggests that whatever rights to the land the Indians may once have possessed have been extinguished in a moral as well as a legal sense.

Mohegan's inability to handle alcohol brings his doom. While Judge Temple and his friends become properly jolly through drink, Mohegan progresses from melancholy, through ferocity, to drunken stupor,

Mohegan continues to sing, while his countenance becomes vacant, though, coupled with his thick bushy hair, it assumes an expression very much like brutal ferocity. His notes gradually grow louder, and soon rise to a height that cause a general cessation in the discourse.

He shook his head, throwing his hair back from his countenance, and exposed eyes that were glaring with an expression of wild resentment. But the man was not himself. His hand seemed to make a fruitless effort to release his tomahawk which was confined by its handle to his belt, while his eyes gradually became vacant. Richard at that instant thrusting a mug before him, his features changed to the grin of idiocy, and seizing the vessel with both hands, he sunk backward on the bench and drank until satiated, when he made an effort to lay aside the mug with the helplessness of total inebriety. (P, 165)
At this point, Natty, observing John's behaviour, generalizes on the inability of all Indians to handle liquor: "This is the way with all the savages; give them liquor, and they make dogs of themselves" (P, 165). Since Mohegan is at the outer fringe of an exceedingly caste-conscious frontier society, the concern that Elizabeth, Judge Temple's daughter, shows for his welfare is quite remarkable: "I grieve when I see old Mohegan walking about these lands, like the ghost of one of their ancient possessors, and feel how small is my own right to possess them.

"But what can I do? What can my father do? Should we offer the old man a home and a maintenance, his habits would compel him to refuse us. Neither, were we so silly as to wish such a thing, could we convert these clearings and farms again into hunting grounds, as the Leatherstocking would wish to see them."

"You speak the truth, Miss Temple," said Edwards. "What can you do, indeed? But there is one thing I am certain you can and will do, when you become the mistress of these beautiful valleys—use your wealth with indulgence to the poor, and charity to the needy; indeed, you can do no more." (P, 283)

There are no essential differences between the views of Edwards, Judge Temple, or his daughter. Between Edwards and the Judge there is a conflict over who owns the land—but none over the uses to which the land should be put. The Judge sees social harmony in terms of abstract laws which are tempered by benevolence, while Elizabeth plays the traditional feminine role which emphasizes charity in contrast to the demands of the law. All three, as Leatherstocking well understands, are firm believers in progress. Edwards' association with Leather-Stocking has done no more than to give him what Judge Temple already has—a nostalgic appreciation for a way of life that is no longer possible. This nostalgia is an ever-present part of the
background which sets off the more immediate events of the novel. Certainly, Mohegan does not wish to live as a dependent upon Judge Temple and his family, and certainly, there can be no halting or turning back of progress. Along with Governor Cass, Elizabeth Temple may "indulge the wish" that the blessings of progress "had been attained at a smaller sacrifice," but she does not stoop to the "miserable affectation" of regretting that progress itself. Although Mohegan poses no threat to anyone in Templeton, Louisa Grant, the naive daughter of the Anglican clergymen, does express fear of his looks, "I am startled by the manner of that Indian. Oh! his eye was horrid, as he turned to the moon" (P, 138).

Mohegan reveals contradictory attitudes at this point which is essential to be noticed:

As his swarthy visage, with its muscles fixed in rigid composure, was seen under the light of the moon, which struck his face obliquely, he seemed a picture of resigned old age on whom the storms of winter had beaten in vain, for the greater part of a century; but when, in turning his head, the rays fell directly on his dark, fiery eyes, they told a tale of passions unrestrained, and of thoughts free as air. The slight person of Miss Grant, which followed next, and which was but too thinly clad for the severity of the season, formed a marked contrast to the wild attire and uneasy glances of the Delaware chief (P, 135).

The contradiction of "rigid composure" and "resigned old age" with "passions unrestrained," "thoughts free as air," and "uneasy glances" is the contradiction between the superficial appearance of the "civilized" Indian and the implied underlying reality revealed by his "fiery eyes." Indeed those "fiery eyes" which startle Louisa that night are symbolically related to the "glaring eyes of a female panther" which caused the same Louisa to sink "lifeless to the earth" in the following summer
The threat implicit in the Indian become explicit in the panther; Leatherstocking has to kill the animal which threatene the innocent lives of the two girls in the same way that he had killed many Indians who had pose a similar threat to innocence.

The one conflict involving John is spiritual and not physical. It centres around John's adherence to Indian beliefs which contradict his conversion by the Moravians. Rev. Mr. Grant, as Mohegan's antagonist in this struggle, expresses his horror at the Indian's notion of revenge: "John, John! is this the religion that you learned from the Moravians? But no - I will not be so uncharitable as to suppose it. They are a pious, a gentle, and a mild people, and could never tolerate these passions." (P, 137) The only alternative is to suppose that John's conversion by the Moravians had not been complete.

He had for a long time been an associate of the white man, particularly in their wars; and, having been, at a season when his services were of importance, much noticed and flattered, he had turned Christian, and was baptized by the name of John…From his long association with the white men, the habits of Mohegan were a mixture of the civilized and savage states, though there was certainly a strong preponderance in favour of the latter. In common with all his people, who dwelt within the influence of the Anglo-Americans, he had acquired new wants, and his dress was a mixture of native and European fashions. (P, 82-83)

As John dies, the Anglican minister inquires of Leather-Stocking whether or not Mohegan's dying chants and songs are Christian; Mr. Grant's horror at the idea of John's reversion to Indian beliefs presents a dogmatic contrast to Leatherstocking's more philosophical and humane approach:
"This is the moment, John, when the reflection that you did not reject the mediation of the Redeemer, will bring balm to your soul. Trust not to any act of former days, but lay the burden of your sins at his feet, and you have his own blessed assurance that he will not desert you."

"Though all you say be true, and you have Scriptur' gospels for it, too," said Natty, "you will make nothing of the Indian. He hasn't seen a Moravian priest sin' the war; and it's hard to keep them from going back to their native ways. I should think it would be as well to let the old man pass in peace." (P, 425)

John himself shows the full extent of his reversion when he says:

"Hawkeye! my fathers call me to the happy hunting grounds. The path is clear, and the eyes of Mohegan grow young. I look, but I see no white skins; there are none to be seen but just and brave Indians. Farewell, Hawkeye! you shall go with the Fire-eater and the Young Eagle [Major Effingham and his grandson, Oliver Edwards], to the white man's heaven; but I go after my fathers. Let the bow and tomahawk, and pipe, and the wampum of Mohegan be laid in his grave; for when he starts 't will be in the night, like a warrior on a war party, and he cannot stop to seek them." (P, 425-26)

A tolerant view of the Indian's dying return to the beliefs of his people.

Leatherstocking's tolerance is more than Mr. Grant's well-meaning but exclusive dogmatism. For example, in his first sermon, several months earlier, Mr. Grant himself had commended to his congregation "'that feeling of universal philanthropy, which, by teaching us to love, cause us to judge with lenity, all men; striking at the root of self-righteousness, and warning us to be sparing of our condemnation of others’" (P, 127-28).
When Mohegan speaks his last words to Hawkeye, Mr. Grant asks whether he is trusting "his salvation to the Rock of Ages" (P, 426). Although Hawkeye answers in the negative, Mohegan, at the moment of death, is described as "reposing against the rock" (P, 427).

This tolerance, however, rests upon a "separate but equal" view of racial development. As such, it leaves very little room for the possibility of genuine conversion to Christianity or civilization. Consequently, it provides very little place in civilized, Christian America for the Indian. Natty Bumppo's tolerant attitude suggests that the most an advancing civilization can do for the Indian is to let him live as best he can and die in peace. Developments in the nineteenth century showed that this was not possible. The tale *The Pioneers* shows that advancing civilization could not let even Natty Bumppo live and die in peace. Mr. Grant's evangelical zeal see possibilities for the eventual assimilation of a civilized and Christian Indian people. Unfortunately, like so many of his fellows who share the same view, his devotion and concern are directed towards the Indian people themselves.

The attitude finally expressed therefore, is that of Elizabeth. Her sentimental charity can only bewail the sad condition of Mohegan. It is powerless to help him because, like the charity of the American people in the nineteenth century, it is over-ridden by the more dominant commitment to progress.

Edwards' epitaph for Mohegan, "'His faults were those of an Indian, and his virtues those of a man'" (P, 458), is a good summary of the novel's understanding of the Indian. It suggests that, as a race, the Indians have certain defects peculiar to themselves but it makes no suggestion that they have any unique virtues and their virtues are common to humanity.
In Mohegan John's degradation, Cooper showed the final results of Indian-white relations as he observed them in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Many well-meaning white men, viewing such degradation in the Indian peoples around them, espoused a removal policy as the one way by which the Indian people could be saved from complete extinction. Cooper, by painting such a vivid picture of John's drunkenness, his marginal status as a part of white society, and his final reversion to Indian beliefs, encouraged to feel that the Indian had no place in white civilization. In doing so, he contributed to the growing sentiment for removal of the Indian people.

Mohegan John and Leatherstocking are incidental in The Pioneers. However, as Marcus Clavel has shown, critics there is great enthusiasm for the portrayal of Leatherstocking, and, to a lesser extent, for that of Mohegan. No doubt this enthusiasm encouraged Cooper to give his readers more of the same." In his youth, Mohegan is known as "Chingachgook," which meant "the Great Snake" (P, 82). Although Cooper presented Chingachgook as a much more heroic and romantic in The Last of the Mohicans, The Pathfinder, and The Deerslayer, neither the reader nor the author can forget that the Indian's last days had already been set forth in The Pioneers. The Pioneers, therefore, has primary importance for an understanding of the direction in which the other Leatherstocking novels must move. The younger Chingachgook of the later novels is predestined to end his life as Mohegan John.

Templeton, the frontier village in which Fenimore Cooper sets The Pioneers, is a community poised between order and chaos. Throughout the early years of its history, civil authority has been lodged in the hands of Judge Marmaduke Temple, the settlement’s fonder. Temple has, without challenge, cleared the wilderness, fostered the development of commerce and agriculture, and established a rudimentary system
of government. The Judge however begins to encounter his first stirrings of resistance. His settlers, whose prosperity is now secure, have become restive under his parental rule. They regard his laws as unwarranted infringements on their liberty and reject his efforts to limit their exploitation of the forests. Their mounting antagonism is paralleled by the opposition of three people who are victims of the historical process which has yielded Templeton. Chingachgook, the last survivor of the Mohican tribe which originally hold Temple’s land is Natty Bumppo, an aged hunter whose tenure in the area far exceeds that of the settlers and Oliver Effingham, the heir of the British family whose forfeited patent Judge has acquired, have each been displayed by the progress Temple has sponsored. Living as a family on the fringe of the village, they dispute the legitimacy of the Judge’s power.

Natty and Chingachgook have remained in Templeton, to preserve the family’s interests, and with Oliver’s marriage, they resign their quarrel with Judge Temple. Cooper discharges their disruptive force as fully as he resolves Oliver’s dispute with the Judge. Chingachgook dies, rendering moot the issue of Indian rights. Relieved of his duty to Major Effingham, Natty gives his blessing to Oliver and Elizabeth and departs for the wilderness to conclude his life in peace.

Cooper also firmly checks the discontent of Templeton’s settlers. Their conflict with the Judge reaches its climax when they falsely accuse Natty and Oliver of starting a forest fire which threatens the village, banding together “in a feverish state,” the community becomes a mob intent on revenge. Just as the anarchy and violence, which is implicit throughout The Pioneers, is about to erupt, Temple appears and demands that the angry crowd disperse, “Silence and peace!” he orders, “why do I see murder and bloodshed attempted! Is not the law sufficient to protect itself, that armed bands must be gathered, as in rebellion or war, to see justice performed!” (P, 440).
For the first time, Temple’s power is fully acknowledged. The chastened citizens submit to his authority and return to their homes. There is the affirm action the lasting effect of the Judge’s intervention by remarking that “the growing wealth and intelligence” of the village’s residents soon rendered them more law-abiding and less susceptible to the restless impulses of frontier democracy (P, 452).

The historiographic intentions in the opening paragraphs of *The Pioneers* is very remarkable. The contemporary condition of the novel’s setting with its primitive origins are really beautiful Cooper writes:

Beautiful and thriving villages, are found interspersed along the margins of the small lakes, or situated at those points of the streams which are favourable to manufacturing; and neat and comfortable farms, with every indication of wealth about them, are scattered profusely through the vales, and even to the mountain tops. Roads diverge in every direction, from the even and graceful bottoms of the valleys, to the most rugged and intricate passes of the hills. Academies, and minor edifices of learning, meet the eye of the stranger, at every few miles, as he winds his way through this uneven territory; and places for the worship of God abound with that frequency which characterizes a moral and reflecting people, and with that variety of exterior and canonical government which flows from unfettered liberty of conscience (P, 9-10).

This pastoral condition is the product of a continuing social evolution:

The whole district is hourly exhibiting how much can be done, in even a rugged country, and with a severe climate, under the dominion of mild laws, and where every man feels a direct interest in the prosperity of a commonwealth, of which he knows himself at form a part. The expediencs of the pioneers who first broke ground in the settlement of this country, are
succeeded by the permanent improvements of the yeoman, who intends to leave his remains to moulder under the sod which he tills, or, perhaps, of the son, who, born in land, piously wishes to linger around the grave of his father. Only forty years have passed since this whole territory was a wilderness.

Having established the virtues of the present-day New York, Cooper announces that his novel will focus on the initial stage of settlement in the area. He concludes, “Our tale begins in 1793, about seven years after the commencement of one of the earliest of those settlements, which have conduced to effect that magical change in the power and condition of the state, to which we have alluded” ?(P, 10-11)

By beginning *The Pioneers* has the historical overview, Cooper anticipates his conclusion and undermines whatever suspense the novel might produce. Whether a given set of conflicts will be eased is at issue in *The Pioneers*. It is a question how its resolutions have prepared the way for the tranquility of contemporary New York. The interest is causality- the dynamics of American development. The challenges to Judge Temple’s authority, most certainly address issues of social and individual principle, but these concerns are subsumed to designate the shaping forces responsible for the magical change.

The rivalry between Judge Temple and Oliver Effingham is, for example, not simply a reworking of the missing heir motif so common but is a restaging of the tensions inherent in America’s revolutionary origins. Temple’s break with Oliver’s father, Colonel Effingham, is provoked, by their divergent loyalties. Effingham’s decision to defend the royalists cause has resulted in the loss of his colonial holdings. Temple’s patriotism has, in turn, permitted him to purchase Effingham’s lands and launch his settlement. Oliver’s marriage to Elizabeth Temple obviously suggests the
reunification of America in the postwar period, but more important than the fact of national reconciliation—which Oliver’s ascendency records—is of that process in dialectical proprietor terms. The grandson of Major Effingham, the colonial proprietor of Temple’s estate, Oliver embodies the refinement of British culture. He is, at the same time, the figurative son of Natty and Chingachgook, with whom. Distant from the crudity of Judge Temple’s village and narrow vision of the Old World, he unifies the grace of Europe, the self-discipline of Indian life, and the forest-taming energies of young America. His marriage not only terminates a familial and a national feud but also epitomizes, the characteristics thrust of American history.

Judge Temple duplicates Oliver Effingham’s function by resisting both the settler’s demands for unlimited expansion and Natty and Chingachgook’s insistence that all progress cease. Incorporating a respect for nature with a commitment to western development, he creates in Templeton a middle ground equally distant from a European city and a trackless wilderness. Just as Temple’s ability to reconcile conflicting polarities anticipates the more refined mediation of Oliver Effingham, Natty’s role foreshadows that of the judge. A white man has internalized the percepts of Indian culture. He stands between Temple and original inhabitants of the forest. His antisocial temperament and his celibacy limit his status to that of a precursor, but the cultural synthesis he achieves inaugurates the historical process which Temple extends and Effingham completes.

The civil law which Judge Temple introduces balances Natty’s internal discipline and the anarchic impulses of the settlers. A religious conflict in the village between the adherents of Anglican orthodoxy and those of evangelical Methodism is meditated by the rational Christianity of the Reverend Grant. The multinational residents of Templeton abandon their hereditary grievances to become Americans.
The winter and summer settings and the major events yielded in *The Pioneers*’ to “the delightful month of October” in which “the weather [is] neither too warm, nor too cold, but of that happy temperature which stirs the blood, without bringing the lassitude of spring” (P, 453). Judge Temple secures his rapprochement with Oliver Effingham and affirms the wisdom of moderation by arguing that in the past “we have both erred; thou hast been too hasty, and I have been too slow” (P, 449).

America begins with Natty Bumppo’s synthesis of European and Indian values. It advances as Judge Temple orders the contending claims of progress and stasis, and it reaches its telos in Oliver Effingham’s reconciliation of the constituent traditions of American life. Moderation and compromise, in short, cease in *The Pioneers* to be values a culture should aspire toward and become the mechanisms that have given that culture shape and direction.

In *The Pioneers* Cooper relocates his characters within a historical frame and employs their conflicts to identify the determining force of Americans development. Although he does not suspend free will in *The Pioneers*, cooper suggests that individual choice is significant only to the degree that it advances or retards the inexorable march of time.

The historiographic interests of *The Pioneers* also establish Cooper’s centrality as American writer. Cultural historians have frequently overstated the extent of social flux during the 1820s, but the generation that came of age during that decade did confront a crisis of cultural definition and collision. America’s boundaries were expanding at a rapid rate, and although the settlement of new territories was an occasion for national pride, that growth also suggested the prospect of cultural diffusion. From the initial moments of the colonial period, the frontier had been associated in the American mind with the erosion of civil authority. The
unprecedented scope of western movement in the years following the war of 1812 exacerbated that concern in a concrete way. The mounting population and power of the New West ruptured traditional economic and regional coalitions and forced the nation to reconsider its priorities. The political perspectives which had shaped American vision since the time of Revolution were inadequate to defuse the impact of this challenge to the status quo. In the face of national expansion and the extension of suffrage, the Federalist hegemony dissipated its energies in a futile defense of regional and class privilege. Simultaneously, Republican leadership fragmented under the weight of increasing population. Whig and Democratic efforts to reformulate political thought in response to a changing America were as yet largely incoherent.

In growing numbers, America reacted to this shifting national fabric by turning to the past. Interest in the nation’s history, which had begun to build at the turn of the century, reached a new peak in the 1820s and 1830s. Cooper’s efforts to engage the American past in The Pioneers reflects this broadly shared sensibility but this is not just a barometer of its times. It is a work which organizes and extends that structure of feeling. More comprehensive and coherent than any historiographic text of its period, The Pioneers identifies and allays contemporary anxiety by containing an uncertain future within a fixed temporal process. Natty Bumppo’s synthesis of Indian and European culture depends upon the centuries of Old World progress that led to American settlement. Judge Temple and Oliver Effingham, in turn, refine the mediation Natty achieves. Although this assumption of forced continuity alleviated one cultural concern, it activated another.

Such an admission was, of course, in conflict with the Adamic presumption at the heart of American belief. To accept the determining role of history was to surrender autonomy, self-reliance, and the eternal prospect of new beginnings. While
such a resignation of the very props of national identity would be unthinkable at any period of cultural history, an admission of historical dependence was particularly difficult for Cooper’s generation. Both the cultural imperialism of Europe and the towering achievements of the founding fathers severely circumscribed the range of political achievements available to Americans in the 1820s.

In plotting the form of American time in *The Pioneers*, then, Cooper confronted diametrically opposed imperatives. The precarious nature of the status quo-imperiled by the proximity of the frontier and the disruption of traditional patterns of social and political organization-led him toward a defense of historical continuity. By conceptualizing American experience as a mechanical process governed by fixed principles of development, he could effectively respond to contemporary concern about the nation’s future. But as a member of a post revolutionary generation informed by both a self-reliant ethos and a longing for historical liberation, Cooper was drawn to deny the determining power of the European and American past. His efforts to establish a historical frame were, therefore complicated by double vision. A commitment to design a controlling temporal order co-existed with an urge to displace historical paternity. In *The Pioneers* Cooper does not acknowledge the mutually exclusive nature of these competing demands but consistently blurs their contradiction. The central thrust of his narrative is toward the creation of a historical paradigm which imposes meaning and direction on national experience. But in crafting that model, Cooper qualifies repeatedly his assertions of temporal entailment. Struggling to establish a perspective which embraces both difference and repletion, he argues that the America of 1823 is both free from, and bound to, the past.

A model of parental strength, the Judge has fostered settlement in the wilderness, provided for his people during times of scarcity, ruled with wisdom and
restraint, and secured the prosperity of his descendants. If an occasion, his ambition appears excessive, it is the well-being of the community and not self-interest that he pursues. Cooper consistently establishes Temple’s personal merits as a standard of context, discipline, and rational growth. His role is not only of a frontier patriarch but that of a cultural polestar. By coupling, for example, a discussion of Judge Temple’s game laws with reports of revolutionary excess in France, Cooper makes explicit Temple’s metaphoric status. In checking the nascent anarchy of Templeton, he secures the promise of American’s future.

The Judge’s bullets wound Effingham and when the Judge discovers his injury, he immediately regrets “trifling her about an empty distinction” and offers Effingham both medical aid and a lifetime residence in his home (P, 19). His generosity does not, however, entirely obscure his expediency. Like the scattered shot of his fowling piece Temple’s principles lack precision. Neither Effingham’s wound nor the Judge’s attempted bribery has serious consequences, but they do suggest a disturbing precedent. The Judge’s weapon “don’t do,” Natty tells him, “to hunt in company with” (P, 22). Nor will his unfocused morality “do,” Cooper implies, as a standard of social authority.

There are examples of Temple’s flexible morality. Although he is no longer Quaker, he pays lip service to his sect’s abolitionist principles. But when he requires a servant for his home, he evades that sanction by purchasing a slave in the name of his cousin, Richard Jones. He declaims against the settlers’ wanton slaughter game, but caught up in the excitement of a pigeon hunt, he participates in their wasteful sport. His subsequent repentance is doubtlessly sincere, but it does not fully restore his stature. The Judge argues that “living, as we do,… on the skirts of society, ” an absolute respect for the law and its officers must be preserved (P, 373). When he
names a sheriff for the district, however, he chooses Jones, a man of manifestly poor judgment whose sole qualification for the post is kinship with Temple. Rather than preserving the community’s peace, Jones and his deputy Hiram Doolittle continually provoke conflict and turmoil.

The Judge remains a figure of parental authority who provides a reassuring context, but the America of 1823 is not the immediate product of his labors. In rising to power, Effingham becomes both father and son. Bound to England, to colonial America, to Indian culture, and to frontier Templeton, he affirms historical continuity. Concurrently, he is a figure of departure and originality who initiates a process of social change which culminates in a new America.

Templeton primacy—of affirming and disrupting generational continuity—is duplicated in his consideration of national identity. Effingham’s marriage forwards a view of America as synthetic culture, a product of the dialectical resolutions of completing traditions. Effingham’s heritage and education are English. Despite his American holdings and his honorary membership in the Mohican tribe, Oliver’s grandfather, Major Effingham, remains a British loyalist. He resists real kinship with the Indians and opposes the colonial struggle for independence. Even as an impoverished old man hidden in Natty’s cabin, he denies the process of change which elevated Judge temple to a position of power. He lives entirely in the past and insists in his confusion that “each one who loves a good and virtuous king, will wish to see these colonies continue loyal” (P, 442). His son, Colonel Effingham, is equally flexible. He has disguised his partnership with Temple in deference to his father’s contempt for Quakers and for commerce, has opposed the American Revolution as a British officer, and has refused to open letters from Temple which would have restored his property.
Temple and Natty are not finally competitors but are parallel figures. By balancing the conflicting demands of progress and tradition, the judge does not repudiate but, rather, refines the synthesis Natty has forged between Indian and European culture.

Cooper adamantly rejects European society as corrupt and, as such, an unworthy model for America; and on the other, he argues for standards of taste and conduct which would permit the nation to approximate more closely the refinement of Old World.

When one comes to America, one finds that there is always a certain slightly devilish resistance in the American landscape, and a certain slightly bitter resistance in the white man’s heart. The American landscape has never been at one with the white man. Never. And white man have probably never felt so bitter anywhere, as here in America, where the very landscape, in its very beauty, seems a bit devilish and grinning.

Natty Bumppo, the hunter and enemy of cities and Chingachgook, nature’s nobleman and Vanishing America are two mythic figures. 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 American wilderness. They have forsaken all others for the sake of the austere, almost inarticulate, but unquestioned love binds them to each other and to the world of nature which they have preferred to civilization.

The developing relationship of the proprietor and his household to the community depends on them by showing their patronage of the village church and
school, their benign encouragement of the village games and festivals, and their authoritative role in the enforcement of law and the administration of justice. In their “obstinate adherence to the wild unsettled habits of savage life,” they “are totally distinct from the busy, thrifty people about them. They seem to be like Indians, either above or below the ordinary cares and anxieties of mankind.” (P, 72)

The account of the slaughter of the passenger pigeons by the inhabitants of Templeton, illustrates bridges the gap between the preceding period, set in late March, and this one:

From this time to the close of April the weather continued to be a succession of great and rapid changes. One day, the soft airs of spring seemed to be stealing along the valley, and in unison with an invigorating sun, attempting covertly to rouse the dormant powers of the vegetable world; while on the next, the surly blasts from the north would sweep across the lake, and erase every impression left by their gentle adversaries. The snow, however, finally disappeared, and the green wheat-fields were seen in every direction, spotted with the dark and charred stumps that had, the preceding season, supported some of the proudest trees of the forest. Ploughs were in motion, whenever those useful implements could be used….The lake had lost the beauty of a field of ice, but still a dark and gloomy covering concealed its waters, for the absence of currents left them yet hidden under a porous crust….Large flocks of wild geese were seen passing over the country, which hovered, for a time, around the hidden sheet of water, apparently searching for a resting-place; and then, on finding themselves excluded by the chill covering, would soar away to the north, filling the air with discordant screams, as if venting their complaints at the tardy operations of nature. (P, 243-44)
The lake now in the “undisturbed possession of two eagles, who alighted on the
centre of its field, and sat eying their undisputed territory”:

During the presence of these monarchs of the air, the flocks of migrating birds
avoided crossing the plain of ice, by turning into the hills, apparently seeking
the protection of the forests, while the white and bald heads of the tenants of
the lake were turned upwards, with a look of contempt. But the time had
come, when even these kings of birds were to be dispossessed. An opening
had been gradually increasing at lower extremity of the lake, and…the fresh
southerly winds, that now breathed freely upon the valley, made an impression
on the waters. Mimic waves began to curl over the margin of the frozen field,
which exhibited an outline of crystallizations that slowly receded towards the
north, at each step the power of the winds and the waves increased, until, after
a struggle of few hours, the turbulent little billows succeeded in setting the
whole field in motion, when it was driven beyond the reach of the eye, with a
rapidity that was as magical as the change produced in the scene by this
expulsion of the lingering remnant of winter. Just as the last sheet of agitated
ice was disappearing in the distance, the eagles rose, and soared with a wide
sweep above the clouds, while the waves tossed their little caps of snow into
the air, as if rioting in their release from a thralldom of five months’ duration.

(P, 244)

There is the meaning of legitimate right and the contest between freedom and
authority. The two eagles, those “monarchs of the air” who eye the birds of passage
with disdain, those “kings of birds” who assert their claim to be the rightful owners
and rulers of their domain and who nevertheless are dispossessed by the winds of
change, are intimately linked to the ultimate significance of the dispute over the
ownership of the land which Judge Temple holds. Similarly, the rebellious waves are one in a whole series of images of the opposition of liberty, license, and anarchy on the one hand and discipline, restraint, and oppression on the other. The scene, however, also serves to establish an immediate relation between nature and man. In denying the lake to other birds, the eagles function as symbols of the reign of winter, at last overthrown with the disintegration of the ice sheet. Their dispossessions signals a liberation and awakening and points backward to the preceding paragraph, in which the “invigorating sun” attempts “to rouse the dormant powers of the vegetable world,” and forward to the release of waves from their winter thralldom. With the keynotes of motion, release, and reanimation thus clearly sounded, Cooper moves swiftly from the natural sphere to the human one:

The following morning Elizabeth is awakened by the exhilarating sounds of the martins, who were quarrelling and chattering around the little boxes suspended above her windows, and the cries of Richard, who was calling in tones animating as the signs of the season itself-

“Awake! awake! my fair lady! the gulls are hovering over the lake already, and the heavens are alive with pigeons.” (P, 201)

Unable to resist this “animated appeal,” Elizabeth Temple joins the group who are “impatiently waiting” to begin the pigeon shoot and finds that “if heavens were alive with pigeons, the whole village seemed equally in motion” (P, 245). With man and nature stirred into buzzing activity by the advent of spring, Cooper can now begin the narration of the episode.

From dispute over the deer that has been shot on the road of Templeton to the final confrontation of Natty and forces of Judge Temple’s law is infused with a spirit of angry contention, with resentment and boasting, with competition and the jealous
assertion of rival claims. The conflict between the primitive freedom of Natty Bumppo and Judge Temple’s attempts to foster the institutions of civilization, and there is the still larger conflict between the self-discipline which both Natty and the Judge champion and the wanton destructiveness of the community at large. But conflict is by no means limited to these two or to these particular issues. In Remarkable Pettibone’s resentment against Elizabeth Temple’s authority in the Judge’s household, in the general hostility to the attempts of Richard Jones and the Judge to establish Episcopalianism as the official mood of worship in Templeton, in the quarrels between Ben Pump and Billy Kirby over the respective merits of salt water and fresh, everywhere in the novel one encounters bickering and baiting, collision grudges and grumbling. The Temple’s housekeeper and their steward settle down with their grog for a Christmas Eve chat but soon fall to squabbling and separate, hurling insults at each other. The turkey shoot brings the “jealous rivalry” of Natty Bumppo and Billy Kirby into “open collision” (P, 191) and is marred by repeated angry disputes over the rules of sport. The fishing expedition violates the stillness of the lake at night with the invectives that express “the turbulent passions of the party”; Judge Temple fears that “there will soon be ill-blood” between the wranglers (P, 190). Having attended the church service on Christmas Eve, the male citizens of Templeton gather in the Bold Dragoon. One would expect a demonstration of Christmas fellowship and good cheer, but opens ominously as Lippet, the village lawyer, and Hiram Doolittle, the carpenter and justice of peace, entertain the pleasing possibility of a lawsuit against Judge Temple. When the Judge and Natty join the group, the two start to argue about the game laws which the state legislature has recently enacted at Temple’s instigation. As Natty lapses into sullen bitterness and
Mohegan begins to mutter his war chant, Richard Jones pipes up with a new song that he has composed:

Then let us be jolly, and prove that we are
A set of good fellows, who seem very rare,
And can laugh and sing all the day.

The song continues while Natty, speaking in Delaware to Mohegan, identifies the Judge as their true enemy. The drunken Indian, his eyes “glaring with an expression of wild resentment,” fumbles at his belt for his tomahawk and then collapses in total inebriation. “Well, old John is soon sowed up,” Jones remarks, and he resumes his cheery ditty (P, 162-65).

For the most part the resentment, rivalry, and hostility of the winter scenes remain safely suppressed beneath the forms of social cooperation and civic harmony. The citizens of Templeton, including those who subscribe to the “conference” of dissenters, dutifully attend the Episcopalian service of Christmas Eve. At its conclusion “sundry looks of private dissatisfaction were exchanged between Hiram and one or two of the leading members of the conference, but the feeling went no further at that time” (P, 128). The frozen earth and ice-locked lake image surface calm of the population of Templeton. For the time, the discipline imposed by social forms, whether they be the decorum of the church service or the rules of the shooting match, is sufficient to prevent the latent enmity that pervades the community from expressing itself in action. The social degradation continues and the Indians try to endure the collision with the whites.

The slaughter of the pigeons and the massacre of the bass, the citizens, organized by Richard Jones give vent to the destructive impulses that the winter discipline has stifled. The frenzy is upon everyone. Although Judge Temple has
contemplated his part in the pigeon shoot “with that kind of feeling that many a man has experienced before him, who discovers, after the excitement of the moment has passed, that he has purchased pleasure at the price of misery to others” (P, 252), he nevertheless is seized once again by the desire to destroy in the fishing scene, “yielding to the excitement of the moment, and laying his hands to the net, with no trifling addition to the force” (P, 261). Even Elizabeth and Louisa Grant, the minister's daughter, are “greatly excited and highly gratified by seeing two thousand captives…drawn from the bosom of lake, and laid prisoners at their feet” (P, 261).

The springtime quickening, then, sharply raises the level of activity and passion in the human world, but the change is not simply a harmonious response by man to the swifter tempo of nature. The flow of the sap, the migration of the pigeons to their northern breeding grounds, the shoals of spawning bass are all manifestations of the creative vitality of nature, a vitality which man here intercepts and truncates with the needless ravages of his ax, gun, and seine. A heavy irony thus qualifies the paralleled renewal of motion in the natural and human worlds, i.e. the Indians and the whites. The processes of nature yield life and plentitude. Man’s activity is productive only of wounds and death. But, for the season, nature serves as a convenient outlet for the destructive impulses that might otherwise act within the community, shattering its pretense of unity.

The pace of activity and the intensity of passion rise to a climax in the scenes set in July. Significantly, the initial incident draws Natty and Mohegan into an abandonment of the self-control and restraint that had distinguished them from the rest of the people during the pigeon shoot and fishing. As Natty watches his dogs drive a deer into the lake, he no longer is the calm advocate of disciplined moderation. He knows that the venison is lean in July, knows that he will get into trouble with law
if he hunts out of season, and yet the sight of the swimming buck is too much for him: “The creator’s a fool to tempt a man this way” (P, 299). Even Mohegan, his dark eye “dancing in his head with a wild animation” (P, 301), loses the stoic resignation that only drink before had violated. They kill the deer, and Natty exclaims, “This warms a body’s blood, old John” (P, 302). In the dry heat of July, everything succumbs to violence, not only the natural man but nature itself. Soon after Natty and Mohegan kill the buck, Elizabeth and Louisa narrowly escape the attack of a panther, whose “glaring eyes” and “horrid malignity” (P, 309) will long haunt Elizabeth’s dreams. As the heat of the summer day increases, animosity spreads throughout the community.

When Hiram Doolittle and Billy Kirby attempt to enter Natty’s hut to find evidence of his violation of the game laws, the hunter assaults Doolittle and threatens Billy with his rifle. Now Judge Temple determines to arrest and try Natty, and Oliver is no longer able to maintain his pose of mild deference before the Judge: “Hitherto he had been deeply agitated by his emotions; but now the volcano burst its boundaries” (P, 348).

Fire and heat, now become an explicit motif of action. Natty is arrested amid the smoldering ruins of his hut where he is “treading down the hot ashes and dying embers with callous feet” (P, 360), as if enacting his effort to smother his rage and submit peaceably to the officers of the court. But animosity and violence flicker throughout the scenes of Natty’s trial and punishment in the stocks and break out once more as Natty, aided by Oliver, makes his escape from jail. The hue-and-cry in the village, “some earnest in the pursuit, and others joining it as in sport” (P, 406), takes us back to the scene of the pigeon shoot, but now the chase is a manhunt. In the action of the following day, the development of the motif of heat is resumed. As she climbs Mount Vision for a meeting with the fugitive, “the very atmosphere that Elizabeth
inhaled was hot and dry” (P, 402). At the summit she encounters Mohegan, who sits there awaiting the approach of death, his eyes filled with “wilderness and fire” (P, 403). Soon the figurative fire once more becomes literal. The torches of the posse that had pursued Natty kindle the dry woods on the mountains. The ensuing conflagration on the summit coincides with the emotional climax. In the desperation of the moment Oliver declares his love for Elizabeth, and Mohegan, scorched and dying, rejects the hope of Christian redemption held out to him by Mr. Grant and returns to the proud stoicism of his pagan past. Although the forest fire is extinguished by a sudden thunderstorm, the human world remains in a “feverish state” (P, 430). Led by Richard Jones, who is “burning with a desire” (P, 435) to examine Natty’s cave under the delusion that it contains a clue to the location of a non-existent silver mine, the village militia assaults Natty’s strong hold. At the moment when the action is about to turn from comic violence to serious bloodshed, Judge Temple and Oliver call for peace. The existence of Major Effingham, Oliver’s grandfather and the original owner of the territory around Templeton, is brought to light, and Oliver’s title to a portion of the Judge’s holdings is acknowledged. With the marriage of Oliver and Elizabeth, the estate is consolidated and established on a sure and lasting basis, for the marriage unites the claims of its legal owner and of its developer.

The gathering rancor of Natty Bumppo against the civilization that is despoiling the wilderness, the reassertion of savage dignity by the dying Mohegan, the emotional tension in Oliver as he is pulled between his resentment of what he thinks has been Judge Temple’s usurpation of his birthright and his love for usurper’s daughter, the aimless curiosity and acquisitiveness of Richard Jones, the deeper avarice of his confederates Jotham Riddel and Hiram Doolittle, and the restless impulse toward destruction of the whole community of Templeton are mirrored by their equally
turbulent and dangerous natural counterpart. Moreover, the functions in a less obvious way as a punishment and a purgative, for Jotham Riddel, the fullest embodiment of the itching greed and anarchic instability that constitute the most pointed indictment of the community at large, dies by its agency. Unwilling to abandon his hunt for the illusory silver, Riddel is overtaken and nearly consumed by flames. The fate of Riddel, “whose life paid the forfeiture of his folly,” conveys “a mortifying lesson” to Richard Jones (P, 452), and the Temple household is henceforth free of his schemes for exploiting the resources of the territory. Resonant in its implications and dramatic in its presentations, the scene of the forest fire thus represents the closest approach to the fulfillment of what would seem to be the major objective of the design of *The Pioneers*, the perfect fusion of natural setting and human action.

The fire scene is effective and its suggestion of symbolic catharsis is not alone a sufficient resolution of the conflicts. Its primary relevance is to the circle that includes Richard Jones, Jotham Riddel, Hiram Doolittle, and those other citizens of Templeton who are similarly devoted to the cause of exploitation and innovation. The center of conflict in, tighter circle that encloses Natty, Mohegan, Oliver and Judge Temple, seems less directly related to fire and its meanings. It is true that the fire contributes to and coincides with the death of Mohegan, but surely we are not intended to regard his death as a retributive cleansing like Riddel’s. On the contrary, all the emphases of Mohegan’s death scene are on release and victory.

The end chapter, is a fall day, “one of our mildest October mornings, when the sun seems a ball of silvery fire, and the elasticity of the air is felt while it is inhaled, imparting vigor and life to the whole system” (P, 452-53). The natural setting is thus an ideal one, reminiscent of that perpetual spring which Thomson imagines to have preceded the corruption of man and the cycle of seasonal change which came as his
punishment. Fire is present in sun, but it is remote, restrained, beneficent. The air itself is life-giving, refreshing, renewing. The mood is that of a benediction, again, as in the death of Mohegan, as if some sweeping cycle had concluded and a fresh beginning could now be made. Within the realm of nature, of course, just such a cycle is about to be completed as the sequence of the seasons swings toward its starting point in winter. That a similarly cyclical revolution has been accomplished in the realm of human affairs may be overlooked so long as to fix our attention to the last scene exclusively on Natty’s departure. Viewed in that way, the ending of the novel seems to be only a realization of Natty’s repeated fear that “might makes right,” that the forces of social order, personified and led by Judge Temple, have triumphed and that he, the representative of the natural order, had been displaced, driven deep into the western wilderness where, at least for the moment, he is beyond the reach of the destructive and all-powerful hand of civilization. This might well be Natty’s interpretation of the outcome of the action. But Natty’s angle of vision is a strangely limited one. In an important sense, he is more primitive, more profoundly embedded in savage isolation than are the Indians with whom he has lived. Not only is he adversary of white society; he has no place in Indian society: no wife, no family, no shared religion, no political status. He is the advocate of animals and trees and the enemy of man and human values. During the pigeon shoot he shakes his head sadly at the sight of “Mr. Oliver, as bad as the rest of them, firing into the flocks, as if he was shooting down nothing but Mingo warriors” (P, 248). Natty regards the Iroquois as fit objects for slaughter, but “the Lord won’t see the waste of his creatures [animals, not humans] for nothing” (P, 248). Denouncing the agents of the society that persecutes him, he says that he has been driven “to wish that the beasts of the forest…was his kindred and race” (P, 360). That wish has long since been fulfilled.
Although the prolonged spectacle of the rancor and destructiveness of the little segment of society over which Judge Temple presides may tempt to share Natty’s point of view, the final position is not a simple primitivistic condemnation of civilization. It is the social degradation to a greater extent.

Seen in its widest dimensions, *The Pioneers* encompasses the whole sweep of the first two hundred years of social change in America, the progression from the hunting culture of the forest Indians, through the initial processes of white settlement, to the establishment of a stable, ordered civilization. Although the action of the novel involves only the middle phase, the narrative is framed, as it were, by the other two. The central action concerns Natty Bumppo and Judge Temple, those embodiments of primitivism and progress who play out their intricate relationship with the period of transition. Natty, of course, rejects the very idea of a human community. Within the scheme of the novel Temple must be depicted as a supporter of the rebellion against the crown, as a betrayer of his Quaker principles by his war-profiteering and his de facto ownership of a Negro slave, as a judge without legal training and with qualifications that “might make a Templar smile” (P, 32). As the proprietor of Templeton, the Judge may censure the excesses of the regicides in revolutionary France, and he may seek to establish the Anglicanism of the British past, but his position is undercut by the principle of change that his whole life has served. He is called “duke” by his friends and his house is known as the “castle”; his cousin Richard Jones thinks that Temple “would make an excellent king” and would give him a throne if it were in his power (P, 182). But this same Jones, this ultra-Episcopalian and whimsical royalist, opens the court in which his cousin sits by flourishing a sword “that he was fond of saying his ancestors had carried in one of
Cromwell’s victories” (P, 362). Temple reign is in reality a short-lived usurpation that must soon give way to the restoration of a fully legitimate authority.

Oliver and Mohegan are figures intended to represent the two phases that enclose the period of transition on which the narrative focuses. As such, they are necessarily passive. Mohegan, to whom Natty pays “the utmost deference on all occasions” (P, 131), had been a great Delaware chieftain, but now his authority and his title to the land have ended. His function is that of a guardian, for he must see that the territory which his people have given in council to Major Effingham passes into the hands of Oliver, its rightful inheritor. Oliver too, must watch and wait until the transition over which Judge Temple presides is accomplished. His part is to be played in the future; for now, he must stand in the wings, eclipsed by the energy of the transitional characters who hold the stage of the present action.

Oliver is qualified for his future role. He is heir to a long tradition of honor, of loyalty to established authority, of continuity in religion and social class. The Effingham line has been a race of soldiers and is distinguished by its chivalric idealism and its absolute integrity, qualities that contrast sharply with the shrewdness, flexibility, and expediency of the mercantile world in which Marmaduke Temple has been schooled. As the son of Edward Effingham, who had been exiled for his allegiance to the crown in the Revolution, Oliver had deep roots in the white past of America; and as the grandson of Major Effingham, who had been proclaimed a chief by the Delawares and adopted by Mohegan as son, he is firmly linked to the Indian past. In the design of the novel of the second relationship is the more important one, for it constitutes the major bridge between the wilderness that used to be and the city that is to come. Again and again there is fundamental parallelism of Mohegan and Oliver as embodiments of the legitimate authority to which Judge Temple cannot
attain. If Mohegan’s manner is “noble” and “Roman” in its dignity (P, 83), Oliver walks “with the air of an emperor” (P, 290); Elizabeth playfully wonders if he “is in secret a king” (P, 282). The village is united in the delusion that Oliver has Indian blood and is possibly the son, grandson, or grandnephew of Mohegan. By the end Oliver is not only the legal heir to the estate which Judge Temple has held in trust for Edward Effingham, but symbolically he is the inheritor of the Indians’ moral claim to the land. It is abundantly right that Mohegan, who has outlived the world to which he belongs, should find release in death at the moment when Oliver’s title to the property is about to be established. Mohegan has accomplished the purpose of his guardianship; the stability and validity of the Indian possession of the land have been passed on intact to the representative of white civilization.

In this transfer of rightful authority, the human world completes the cycle of change which the seasonal progression in its natural world has echoed and reinforced. In both detail and grand design The Pioneers thus works steadily and effectively toward the full union of its diverse materials, constructing from them a powerful and meaningful image of American life and American landscape. Cooper’s achievement in the novel is an important one. From the variety of influences and stimuli which contribute to the conception and the interplay of natural and social change which gives the book its structure, he succeeded in devising a form that proceeds from the materials both functionally and with compelling beauty.