

Cross-Cultural Hybridity in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*

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Scholars of James Fenimore Cooper have generally interpreted *The Last of the Mohicans* and its American Indian characters as emblematic of the Vanishing American convention in American literature, whereby Natives must be subsumed in order for a young America to fulfill its destiny. In a popular sense, the novel has come to be viewed as an adventure story of our country's beginnings, an American counterpart to Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* escapades set against the backdrop of a pristine yet unpredictable wilderness, the inhabitants of which eventually disappear. Typically, approaches to Cooper's novel draw on sources such as Rousseau and Columbus,¹ whose contemplations of a "new" American landscape and its inhabitants serve as much of the basis for the Noble Savage convention in literature.

Indians' roles in defining America and differentiating it from the "Old World" perhaps explain the extreme popularity of Cooper's *Leatherstocking* series among nineteenth-century readers who were eager to locate a unifying, recognizable history for their "new" country, which was enduring—violently—the growing pains of settlement and national expansion and was seeking to define its unique contribution to literature, art, and history amidst the shadow of Europe. Ironically, while Indians were chief referents for imagining Americanness, they were also chief roadblocks to the nation's achievement of dominion over the North American continent, and as a result the American experience came to be typified in literature by Native and European contact and confrontation—in other words, encounters² at both cultural and geographical borders.

The binary between the "old" and "new" individual and the moral complications of contact between these oppositions have thus permeated scholarship on Cooper's text from the time of its publication to the present. Recently, these approaches have emphasized Europeans' moral failings in

their opposition to American Indians and have concentrated on the societal consequences of those failings. Leslie Fiedler has posited, "This Europe and this America are . . . no more facts of geography than Cooper's Indians and whites are facts of ethnography; the place-names stand for corruption and innocence, sophistication and naivete, aesthetics and morality" (191). Gaile McGregor offers: "[T]he Indian offered Cooper a versatile reference point for exploring the psychic social and particularly the moral dimension of the American's existential dilemma" (125). And Robert Milder concludes: "[T]he . . . dominant mood is one of loss, not celebration. Partly this loss is the Indians', but *the more significant loss* is that of the conquerors themselves, whose succession to the land is tainted by violence and guilt" (408-09, italics mine). These readings, while apt in the way in which they problematize conquest, or "settlement" of America, and point toward the influence of the Noble Savage convention on Cooper's novel, nevertheless maintain a relatively exclusive focus on the psychological and ethical dispositions of Europeans and neglect the dynamic role that American Indians also espouse in the text. In several ways, *The Last of the Mohicans* offers a more complex—though often subtle—presentation of cross-cultural contact—and even reciprocity—than most critics have recognized.

Monica Kaup and Debra J. Rosenthal are among a small number of scholars who address the prominence of cultural and racial hybridity in Cooper's works. Contrasting the work of Fiedler and Terry Goldie, Kaup and Rosenthal offer the following analysis:

[B]oth Fiedler's classic American Studies approach and Goldie's postcolonial critique . . . remain caught within a binary mode (white v. Indian), which cannot adequately recognize a third dynamic, the process of hybrid crossing. To view the imaginary kinship of whites with Natives merely in terms of appropriation . . . is to overlook that the process of imaginary projection as native American is more than semiotic kidnapping to empower Euro-Americans. (xiv)

In addition to arguing for greater attention to the mediation of boundaries and the cross-cultural exchange evident in Cooper's text, Barbara A. Mann rightly points out that a continued exclusive emphasis on Cooper's ties to European sources neglects the possibility that, though there are some historical errors in his fictional rendering of tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy, Cooper had some knowledge of indigenous communities in the Northeast, including the Oneida community that had inhabited the land of his childhood. Mann argues:

Euro-Americans seldom take the step of educating themselves concerning Native history and culture. . . . If they cannot locate the Leather-Stocking core, it is because they are looking in all the wrong places: in Europe,

John Locke and Sir Walter Scott instead of into the Fire at Onondaga, the mainland colonial slave codes, or the rift between colonial British and American policy on Indian miscegenation. Ironically, for all touted multiculturalism in academia today, there has been surprisingly little movement in the direction of assessing James Fenimore Cooper as an author ahead of his time in terms of cross-cultural application. (2-3)

In order to accurately assess Cooper's contribution to American literature, especially to recognize the relevance in the present day of the issues he raises in *The Last of the Mohicans*, a reading of the text with particular attention to the cultural hybridity he depicts is useful.

Cooper sets up the novel with several suggestions of the cultures that have converged to create America—and the tension that convergence has instigated. The introduction evokes a sense of multiplicity among Indian people, referring to diverse tribes and tribal languages and suggesting the possibility of Asiatic influences among them. Yet Cooper acknowledges a simplistic and widespread fear of Indian "savages," which contributed to the popularity of narratives of captivity in the years following King Philip's War and later accompanied violent campaigns against American Indians. Rather than stoking this fear, Cooper seems somewhat to defuse it, instead characterizing Indians' temperament as a bit more complicated:

Few men exhibit greater diversity, or . . . greater antithesis of character, than the native warrior of North America. In war, he is daring, boastful, cunning, ruthless, self-denying, and self-devoted; in peace, just, generous, hospitable, revengeful, superstitious, modest, and commonly chaste. These are qualities, it is true, which do not distinguish all alike; but they are so far the predominating traits of these remarkable people as to be characteristic. (v)

While this description is not altogether three-dimensional, it does attribute a dynamism to American Indians that challenges the doubtfulness many nineteenth-century readers may have felt as to the humanity of Natives.

While Cooper avoids stock introduction to his Indian characters, he also avoids categorically positive or heroic characterizations of European Americans in the beginning of the novel. Instead, he describes colonists' dispositions as bordering on irrational hysteria:

Numberless recent massacres were still vivid in their recollections; nor was there any ear in the provinces so deaf as not to have drunk in with avidity the narrative of some fearful tale of midnight murder, in which the natives of the forests were the principal and barbarous actors. As the credulous and excited traveler related the hazardous chances of the wilderness, the blood of the timid curdled with terror, and mothers cast anxious glances even at those children which slumbered within the security of the largest towns. In short, the magnifying influence of fear

began to set at naught the calculations of reason, and to render those who should have remembered their manhood, the slaves of the basest of passions. (14)

Cooper relays volatility in the setting of his narrative, which heightens a mood of suspended action and excitement, yet he also provides a basis for the human considerations that will accompany his adventure tale. As John McWilliams reveals, "For the casual nineteenth-century reader, Cooper plainly knew how to turn racial fear into a gripping read" (16). Amid unstable borders, the characters (and readers) are forced to confront those they perceive to be their opposition, and in the process they have the opportunity to be transformed.

Cooper portrays this cultural reciprocity in scenes in which Indian and white characters discuss their cultural origins in the American landscape and relate them to the broader discussion of the development of a nation. Early in the novel, Bumppo and Chingachgook compare stories of how their people came to inhabit their current geographical space. Referencing the moral questions surrounding European entry into the area, Bumppo, speaking in a Native language, simply makes the originary stories parallel, asserting: "Your fathers came from the setting sun, crossed the big river, fought the people of the country, and took the land; and mine came from the red sky of the morning, over the salt lake, and did their work much after the fashion that had been set them by yours; then let God judge the matter between us, and friends spare their words!" (34). Bumppo continues with an evaluation of his European ancestry, disparaging whites' tradition of depending upon print to convey their experiences yet venerating the Bumppos for their skill at shooting.

Bumppo then asks Chingachgook about his ancestors: "... every story has its two sides: so I ask you, Chingachgook, what passed, according to the traditions of the Red Men, when our fathers first met?" (35). Chingachgook, after relaying an emergence narrative of his people's journey across the plains to his current dwelling, tells, with some emotion, of the Mohicans' thriving culture at the time of contact with whites: "... we were one people, and we were happy. The salt lake gave us its fish, the wood its deer, and the air its birds. We took wives who bore us children; we worshiped the Great Spirit; and we kept the Maquas beyond the sound of our songs of triumph!" (37). Chingachgook then describes the effect of contact:

"The Dutch landed, and gave my people the firewater; they drank until the heavens and the earth seemed to meet, and they foolishly thought they had found the Great Spirit. Then they parted with their land. Foot by foot, they were driven back from the shores, until I, that am a chief and a Sagamore, have never seen the sun shine but through the trees, and have never visited the graves of my fathers!" (37-38)

In this exchange of ideas concerning the relative merits of their cultures, Bumpo and Chingachgook engage in a moral debate about the events surrounding the growth of the American nation. Importantly, both men are reminded of the achievements of their ancestors as well as of the mistakes their people have made. Though the Dutch are chiefly to blame for displacing Chingachgook's community, Chingachgook seems to regret that his kin, who were previously able to ward off enemies, failed to stand their ground because of the influence of the alcohol that Europeans introduced. Likewise, it is probable that Bumpo's "solemn feelings" (38) are due in part to his feelings of association with the infiltrators. As a result, rather than representing Fiedler's binary of "sophistication versus naivete," the two seem to exhibit mutual insight.

Not only does the two characters' conversation display a contemplative approach to a meeting of multiple histories in America, but also this episode conveys the way in which this meeting at the borders is linked to the processes of the natural environment. For the ancestral communities of both characters, thriving within the American landscape has involved control of ecological resources. When Chingachgook remembers the "happy days" of his people, his memories are specifically characterized by plentiful ecological resources and a capacity to keep enemies, "Maquas," from accessing those resources. Similarly, Bumpo's understanding of his genealogical identity corresponds to his ancestors' skill at hunting the creatures that inhabit that ecological space.

Thus, each character's cultural ancestry is clear in how he relates to the natural world. Chingachgook's heritage is a tradition of synchronizing life, both spiritually and practically, to natural phenomena and waging war to maintain that existence; the Bumpo legacy involves confronting wilderness, whether for survival or for sport. The environmental dimension to this convergence of varied and conflicting cultural legacies orients the novel as particularly American. As McGregor explains, "The brand of nature to be found in America, far from being *inferior* to the European style, was thus uniquely suited to the optimism of a new nation" (94). Rather than the sense of order ascribed to the Romantic natural scenes of Europe, America's landscape was far more complex and open to possibility, yet this possibility is not necessarily always unequivocally optimistic in Cooper's novel.

Cooper's characters locate their identities in specific environmental spaces, and when those spaces change or are transformed, a sense of loss often ensues. According to Donelle N. Dreese,³ this kind of "territorialization" occurs when individuals identify "a landscape or environment as intrinsic to their own conceptualizations of self" (3). Dreese's ecological framework applies to Chingachgook's sense of dislocation as a result of his separation from the shores his people inhabited before the arrival of the

Dutch. He is particularly saddened because he has never seen the sun as his ancestors did, and he has never visited the land where they are buried. In effect, he is removed from his "Native space." Similarly, he articulates his lack of hope for the future in ecological terms, of geographical dislocation: "'Where are the blossoms of those summers! Fallen, one by one. So all of my family departed, each in his turn, to the land of spirits. I am on the hilltop, and must go down into the valley; and when Uncas follows in my footsteps, there will no longer be any of the blood of the Sagamores, for my boy is the last of the Mohicans'" (38).

Like Chingachgook, Bumpo also seeks to locate a sense of identity by connecting to the natural world, and when that world is altered, he too expresses ambivalence. One of the most poignant instances in which Bumpo conceptualizes his self in terms of ecological phenomena occurs in his description of Glenn's Falls:

"[T]he falls have neither shape nor consistency. . . . If you had daylight, it would be worth the trouble to step up on the height of this rock, and look at the perversity of the water. It falls by no rule at all; sometimes it leaps, sometimes it tumbles; there, it skips; here, it shoots; in one place 'tis white as snow, and in another 'tis green as grass; hereabouts, it pitches into deep hollows, that rumble and quake the 'arth; and thereaway, it ripples and sings like a brook, fashioning whirlpools and gulleys in the old stone, as if 'twas no harder than trodden clay. The whole design of the river seems disconcerted. First it runs smoothly, as if meaning to go down the descent as things were ordered; then it angles about and faces the shores; nor are there places wanting where it looks backward, as if unwilling to leave the wilderness, to mingle with the salt! . . . After the water has been suffered to have its will, for a time, like a headstrong man, it is gathered together by the hand that made it, and a few rods below you may see it all, flowing on steadily toward the sea, as was foreordained from the first foundation of the 'arth!" (63-64)

In this episode, Cooper captures the complex confrontation of peoples, their origins, and cultures, that typifies the historical moment in which Bumpo finds himself. Just as the falls seem disconcerted, lacking rule, and at times hesitant to converge on their way to a vast sea, so too various groups in America are experiencing tension and violence in their encounters with one another on their way to a common plain, which reflects a multi-faceted yet overarching synthesis.

Similar to Chingachgook's description of his existence before the arrival of the Dutch, Bumpo seems to remember a time when the falls were undivided and undisturbed. In this self-referential formulation, he likens the falls to a conflicted man, which clearly alludes to his own conflicted identity as one bound to his American Indian comrades yet also defined in part by his European origin. And also like Chingachgook, at the end of

the novel, Bumpo is compelled by a tremendous sense of loss as a result of the fading presence of his people: his European traveling companions as well as his fellow dwellers of the woods. Importantly, his connection to a particular geographical space strongly compels him: "Hawk-eye returned to the spot where his own sympathies led him, with a force that no ideal bond of union could bestow. He was just in time to catch a parting look of the features of Uncas, whom the Delawares were already inclosing in his last vestments of skins" (413). For Bumpo, who encompasses a hybrid identity, the location in the forest of contact among varied peoples is the most appropriate place to continue to live out his existence.

In the same way that these locations of contact, or ecological spaces, correspond to Chingachgook's and Bumpo's senses of personal ancestry and identity, these zones also exhibit a synergy with the events in the novel that bind them and other characters together in a narrative of cross-cultural contact in early America. This linking of ecology and human originary action reflects David Mazel's understanding of environmentalism as a more complicated discipline than a philosophy that mirrors domestic Orientalism, or an approach to nature as "a self-evidently pure and 'good' resistance to an external and 'bad' force" ("American" 43). Drawing on the lessons of Edward Said's framework, Mazel argues for an analysis of environment as "just one of many potential modes for exercising power, as a particular 'style,' both political and epistemological, 'for dominating, restructuring, and having authority' over the real territories and lives that the environment displaces and for which it is invoked as a representation" (43). In this reading, in Cooper's novel, the natural world is more than a passive abstraction to be confronted; instead, it is an agent that is present in human actions.

The environment's participatory role is evident perhaps most strikingly in scenes of violence and apparent degradation that heighten the plot's suspense. One such scene occurs when David Gamut's colt is killed before Bumpo, Chingachgook, and their fellow travelers become entangled in the many bloody battles that will typify their journey together. Though Gamut begs for the creature's life, Bumpo insists that circumstances necessitate the sacrifice of the innocent and instructs Uncas to bring a quick end to the foal. This scene sets the stage for the indiscriminate destruction of a woman and her infant at the massacre after the surrender of Fort William Henry, where nature itself seems to encompass the devastation wrought by human conflict.

After Indian allies of the French slaughter retreating English, the landscape at the fort, flowing with rivers of blood and dotted with the bodies of the dead, captures the harsh but intrinsic nature of humanity. This human existence is marked by both violence and survival:

[H]ere and there, a dark green tuft rose in the midst of the desolation; the earliest fruits of a soil that had been fattened with human blood. The whole landscape, which seen by a favoring light, and in a genial temperature, had been found so lovely, appeared now like some pictured allegory of life, in which objects were arrayed in their harshest but truest colors. (213-14)

These scenes, and the environments that enact them, lay out the bare and sometimes ugly truth of human actions, especially within the context of contact across varied cultures. As Shirley Samuels has shown, "these killings conflate domestic and wild, suggesting the conflation of animals and humans throughout the novel" (87), and ultimately, "frontier transactions involving animals and humans produce a radically crossed or miscegenated identity, producing, in effect, a miscegenation between nature and culture" (89).

This conflation of features of the natural world with the processes of human cultures in contact is also evident at the end of the novel when almost all of the main characters don disguises of nature, including animalistic costumes, in order to rescue Alice and Cora from their Huron and Delaware captors. As Betty Becker-Theye points out, these humans in animal disguise, akin to the murdered infant who is represented by the helpless colt, are virtually the only animals present in the novel, making the human/environment bond all the more pointed in the transmission of the plot (48). This donning of elements of the natural world first occurs when Chingachgook, who is skilled at "tak[ing] down natur' on scraps of paper" (270), makes a "natural fool" (271) of Duncan Heyward, using key symbols of nature to paint on him the disguise of a juggler, a healer who tags along with tribal allies of the Hurons, an identity far removed from his stature as a major in the English military.

Through this disguise and his use of French, Duncan is able to enter the company of the Hurons, who he acknowledges have "an instinct nearly commensurate with his own reason" (272) and proceed to the location where Magua is holding Alice captive. Before entering the cave, at Bumpo's instruction, Heyward washes away the paint in order to approach Alice in a pale-faced state that Bumpo believes a white daughter of a colonel expects. However, in order for Heyward to remove her to safety, he must disguise Alice in the clothes of an Indian woman, thereby continuing to, in Samuels's words, "trouble the presumed integrity" (99) of European identity in order to ensure survival.

Hawkeye, Gamut, and Uncas are also critical to this rescue scene, as their assumption of animal disguises further enables them and their friends to escape the Huron camp. After Uncas is captured, Hawkeye enters the camp disguised as a bear and attempts to signal his presence to Gamut

by singing. Confused and a little afraid, Gamut exclaims to Heyward that Alice is expecting him, which spurs Heyward's enactment of his escape plan. Hawkeye enters the cave and frightens Magua, allowing Heyward to tie him up and escape with Alice. Still in the guise of a bear, Hawkeye goes to the hut where Gamut, still mentally shaken about the seemingly human nature of the bear, has covered his bald head with a "triangular beaver" (317). After Hawkeye reveals himself to Gamut, the two enter the hut where Uncas is imprisoned, and there, the three men swap dress: Uncas wearing the bear skin, Hawkeye wearing the clothes of Gamut, and Gamut wearing Hawkeye's hunting shirt in order to remain and impersonate Uncas.

This exchange signifies a breakdown in demarcations of race and of components of the natural world that are perceived to be rigid. As Mazel concludes, toward its end, the novel moves into a "fluidity of performance—suggesting that nature is not 'natural' at all but performative. . . there looms also a sense of category crisis, of a breakdown in the very structures by means of which nature and culture have been demarcated in the first place" ("Performing" 108). This "category crisis," or instability of social, natural, and cultural boundaries, accompanies unstable identity for many of the major characters, who without rigid boundaries, renegotiate their understandings of both their relations to one another and their own senses of self. Similarly, Samuels argues that these disguises are merely one reflection of the way in which the novel continually complicates rigid classifications of identity, emphasizing "collisions and confusions" (98).

More extensive evidence of the way in which this meeting of ostensibly disparate cultures produces more enduring consequences occurs in the temperaments and behaviors of the characters themselves, especially the characters' relationships to one another. While Fiedler has made much of the "doubling" of opposite characters in the novel—dark-skinned versus white, savage versus civilized, pagan versus Christian—most of the characters in fact display some kind of mediation or modification as a result of their experiences in the woods with representatives of other cultures, displaying what anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell calls "transculturalization," whereby individuals "enter the web of social relations that constitute another society, and come under the influence of its customs, ideas, and values to a greater or lesser degree" (523).

While much has been written about the "savage nobility" of Cooper's American Indian characters, including Uncas and Chingachgook, most critics are content to understand Magua as simply savage. Whether they attribute this savage characterization to Cooper's failure to portray effective literary characters or to racism against American Indians, these critics fail to evaluate Magua within the context of cultural collision in Cooper's text, a context which places him squarely at the crossroads of various tribal and

colonial alliances during a time of war. Relegating him to a "bad Indian" camp, many fail to perceive the diverse influences and experiences that have made Magua the more interesting tragic villain that he is. Cleverly, Cooper draws Magua in a way that plays into the fears of nineteenth-century white readers, yet he also projects readers' fears onto a character whose quest for revenge is largely due to the harmful actions of European settlers.

Magua's description of the history behind his arrival as a Mohawk warrior reveals the degree to which European infiltration has contributed to his present state. He explains to Cora:

"Magua was born a chief and a warrior among the red Hurons of the lakes; he saw the suns of twenty summers make the snows of twenty winters run off in the streams, before he saw a paleface; and he was happy! Then his Canada fathers came into the woods and taught him to drink the firewater, and he became a rascal. The Hurons drove him from the graves of his fathers as they would chase the hunted buffalo. He ran down the shores of the lakes, and followed their outlet to the city of cannon. There he hunted and fished, till the people chased him again through the woods into the arms of his enemies. The chief, who was born a Huron, was at last a warrior among the Mohawks!" (119-20)

This narrative, which H. Daniel Peck calls "the novel's most compelling elegiac vision of Indian dispossession" (9) is remarkably similar to Chingachgook's description of his own people's dispossession and his particular sadness at being separated from the graves of his ancestors. The similarity begs the question: Why do Magua and Chingachgook end up so remarkably different?

The answer seems to lie in Magua's "becoming a rascal," neglecting the values of his people and becoming subject to the influence of those who want to use him, especially French commanders allied with the Mohawks. The difference in the two characters' animalistic names reveals much about their natures. According to Hawkeye, Chingachgook, whose indigenous name means "big serpent" in English, "'understands the winding and turnings of human nature'" (67), which perhaps explains why, even though he has aided Heyward and Munro and developed a profound bond with Hawkeye, he has nonetheless endured as a valiant Mohican. In contrast, Magua struggles with the Delaware language and refers to himself in French as "Le Renard Subtil," or "The Subtle Fox," the name given to him by his "Canadian fathers," a designation that emphasizes Europeans' approximation of him, an identity that he has internalized. In this way, Magua's betrayal of Heyward in the beginning of the novel, when he intends to lead him and the Munro daughters into a trap, as well as his insistence on exacting revenge on Munro by taking one of his pale-faced daughters as a wife, is right in line with this French colonial affiliation. Magua's actions mirror

Montcalm's violation of his terms of surrender with Munro, a surrender which features a slaughter of innocents while the English are in retreat to Fort Edward. Unlike Chingachgook, whose body is drawn clearly in "intermingled colors of white and black" (32), Magua's face reflects the degree to which his alliances have transformed him: "The colors of the war paint had blended in dark confusion about his fierce countenance" (20).

Importantly, Magua is thereby not as inhuman as many readers, and some critics, expect him to be, and moreover, what makes Magua so interesting is the degree to which he recognizes the corruption of the people with whom he has consorted. At the end of the novel, in his appeal to Tamenund for the return of his escaped prisoners, Magua portrays the white man as most cunning: "'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 inclose 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'" (356-57). Magua places the blame on his weakness for alcohol, through which he strayed from his people and for which Munro has publicly "'whipped him like a dog'" (120), squarely with colonial invaders: "'Was it the fault of Le Renard that his head was not made of rock? Who gave him the firewater? Who made him a villain?'" (120). Indeed, it may be Magua's refusal to see his own agency in his fate that is his tragic flaw, a complexity of character that makes him quite compelling.

Like Magua, Cora exhibits a plurality of affiliation, but whereas Magua's personal weakness leads to villainy within this context of transculturalization, Cora's moral fortitude makes her the novel's heroine. As the child of Colonel Munro and a woman descended from Africans enslaved in the West Indies, Cora is portrayed as of mixed ancestry, an embodiment of her father's cross-racial union. Cora's diverse background distinguishes her from her purely Scottish sister Alice, and the two provide a commentary on femininity in an American space separate from the fineries of Europe. While Alice is timid and easily frightened into faints, Cora is passionate, independent, and brave, reminiscent of other heroines of popular nineteenth-century fiction yet unique in her effectiveness in a wilderness setting outside of the domestic sphere. Her appearance is likewise unique: "The tresses of this lady were shining and black, like the plumage of the raven. Her complexion was not brown, but it rather appeared charged with the color of the rich blood, that seemed ready to burst its bounds. And yet there was neither coarseness nor want of shadowing in a countenance that was exquisitely regular and dignified, and surpassingly beautiful" (21). Cora's matchless attributes, including her determination to protect her sister, prepare her for the trials she endures. As McWilliams explains, "To all characters who understand

the forest, Cora seems a significant human being but Alice remains at best a tender blossom" (73).

Nina Baym has written extensively of the contrast between Alice and Cora, emphasizing the appropriateness of Alice's ineffectual behavior in a male-dominated white world. Baym believes that this behavior ultimately saves Alice: "A woman's weakness is her strength in the white world, because it inspires men like Duncan, representative of European-American civilization, to fight for her" (77). Baym is correct that Alice is the more appropriate match for Duncan in the white world, especially because, as Barbara Mann reminds us, under colonial law, Cora would have been classified as a slave in that world (51). However, Alice is not the only character for whom Heyward and others risk their lives; Cooper has gone to great lengths to craft an elaborate and dangerous cooperative escape plot, complete with costumes, for the survival of almost all of the main characters, and later in the novel, Uncas leads an entire Delaware nation, as well as Hawkeye, Gamut, and Heyward, into war against Magua and the Hurons on Cora's behalf.

More importantly, while Alice does not embody the strength of Cora, she is not quite the shrinking flower that many critics have perceived her to be, and she does exhibit insight and bravery at crucial moments. It is because of Alice that Gamut, who later contributes to the success of the escape plan, is included among the company, as Alice suspects that Cora's initial trust of Magua may be misplaced. Further, when Alice first sees the gallant Uncas, she recognizes that a fear of Indian savagery that has accompanied her genteel upbringing may have been unfounded, telling Heyward, "I could sleep in peace . . . with such a fearless and generous looking youth for my sentinel. Surely, Duncan, those cruel murders, those terrific scenes of torture, of which we read and hear so much, are never acted in the presence of such as he!" (61). Alice correctly puts her trust not solely in Heyward, but also in Uncas, the most skilled warrior.

Additionally, Alice expresses her solidarity with her sister at times when Heyward is ready to give Cora up. When Cora faces the prospect of becoming Magua's wife in order to spare her and Heyward, Cora, who is too distraught to decide whether she can make the sacrifice, asks Heyward for his judgment, yet he shrinks from the task. It is instead Alice who makes the call. "Keenly conscious," Alice asserts, "No, no, no; better that we die as we have lived, together!" (129). Finally, Alice stands up for her sister when Heyward first finds Alice in the cave and suggests leaving Cora behind because of her "obscured worth" as a mixed blood, which precludes his earlier "open admiration" of her (24). Withdrawing her hand from Duncan's and interrupting his case for an immediate departure, Alice quips "You knew not the merit of my sister" (308).

Although Fiedler complains that immediately after this conflict, when Heyward proposes marriage, "she responds, not with the proud warmth of Cora, but trembles and almost faints as is 'common to her sex'" (206), it is quite possible that Alice is in fact not shrinking from the prospect of marriage but is instead shrinking from the prospect of marriage to someone who may have earlier preferred her sister, who he now believes is worthless! Ultimately, Alice is not in simplistic opposition to Cora; instead, like Cora, she exhibits keen perception and rises to new levels of endurance because of her journey through an ecological space she has never before faced, a zone of varied cross-cultural contact that leaves her transformed to some degree. This transformation—not Duncan—is what truly leads to her escape. Like her encasement in Indian clothing, her survival is tied to a more resilient identity. As Samuels asserts, "The novel might be said to locate the future of national culture in the wrapping of Alice's body" (99).

Despite Alice's strides, she is not prepared to go head-to-head with Magua, which is exactly what Cora does. Perhaps because of her own diverse heritage, her "dark secret" that could potentially lead to her enslavement if exposed, Cora exhibits a complex interest in Magua. Upon first seeing him, she displays "an indescribable look of pity, admiration, and horror" (21). Though he represents to her a savage villainy that she has surely been warned against, Magua is nevertheless similar to her in his affiliation with a European power structure that degrades him. At first she defends Magua, scolding others who question his loyalty, demanding: "'Should we distrust the man because his manners are not our manners, and that his skin is dark!'" (24). Perhaps her initial rush to defend the guide with whom she has no acquaintance stems chiefly from her sense of identification with him on some level.

Later, however, when Magua tries to take her as his wife, Cora is disgusted and shocked, as her upbringing as a "chaste female" would certainly preclude union to one of another race. Cora engages in a debate with Magua that captures the way in which rigid racial structures that she has been reared to uphold, boundaries which require her to pass as white, are threatened in the present setting. She naively questions the plausibility of Magua's demands: "'And what pleasure would Magua find in sharing his cabin with a wife he did not love; one who would be of a nation and color different from his own'" (122). Yet Magua does not want a life mate; he wants revenge.

Not only does Magua want Cora to experience physical hardship that mirrors the whipping he received at the direction of Munro, but also by taking Cora to live among the graves of his fathers, he wants Munro to experience the kind of dislocation from the space of his kin that he himself has experienced: "The daughter of Munro would draw his water, hoe his

corn, and cook his venison. The body of the grayhead would sleep among his cannon, but his heart would lie within reach of the knife of *Le Subtil*" (122-23). Without the forced security of firm racial boundaries, Magua emphasizes that European entrants into America are subject to the same kind of transformation that they impose upon the country's indigenous inhabitants. In the words of Mann, "Cora, the assimilationist, identifies with and defends European interests, which she has internalized as her own. Magua, the Indian nationalist, rejects and hates European interests as inimical to his being. Importantly, neither can acquit the defendant, Munro, no matter how much Cora might like to" (56).

When Cora fails to convince Magua to stop his pursuit of her, she appeals to a higher authority: the Tamenund, or chief, of the Delawares. However, Cora's pleas do not discount the central fact of the interests of his Delaware people and the impact of their dispossession that drive the Tamenund's judgment. Like Magua's, the Tamenund's thoughts are primarily with a past greatness, which he recollects in ecological terms: "It was but yesterday, . . . that the children of the Lenape were masters of the world. The fishes of the salt lake, the birds, the beasts, and the Mengwee of the woods, owned them for Sagamores" (361). It seems that Cora recognizes the validity of the Tamenund's argument, as she at last bows her head and "struggle[s] with her chagrin" (361). Further, the Tamenund highlights the negative traits he has observed among the "palefaces," particularly their abhorrence of intermarriage, saying "The dogs and crows of their tribes . . . would bark and caw before they would take a woman to their wigwams whose blood was not of the color of snow" (362). To this summation, Cora concedes simply "It is so" (362). As Geoffrey Rans explains, "Tamenund's ruminations . . . evoke in clouded poetic memory the history of Indian victimization at the hands of the white man Again it is given to Cora to concede the point—and it could not be more touching that she, of mixed blood, is the recipient of these particular words" (113). In short, the Tamenund backs Magua. Cora has no further comment.

Though Cora admits the validity of the case against her father, she does not give up her plea for the safety of her sister, directing the chief to listen to the strongest of her allies: Uncas, who is being held prisoner in the Delaware community. A masculine counterpart to Cora, Uncas, called "*Le Cerf Agile*" or "*The Nimble Deer*," is the strongest, most positive man in the novel and is therefore predictably her suitor by the end of the narrative. Unlike Magua, "*The Nimble Deer*" has retained his synergy with the "attitudes and movements of nature" (61), and he speaks in the Delaware language, the language of his fathers. Though his captors decry his alliance with the "Yengeese" over the French, Uncas is finally spared death because of the discovery of his tortoise tattoo, the symbol of his revered lineage in

the dwindling Mohican turtle clan, the proof of his status as a young chief and the source of hope for the Delaware people.

As Uncas assumes his authority as Sagamore, he unites the Delawares, regardless of English or French affiliation, and they submit to his judgment, allowing Heyward and Alice to go free and accepting Hawkeye as a legitimate ally. Yet in a heart-wrenching moment, he validates Magua's right to hold Cora captive in accordance with Delaware custom, and Cora bravely agrees to follow Magua, rejecting Hawkeye's offer of death for her preservation. Though Uncas accedes to this custom in allowing Magua to disappear into the trees, he immediately rallies his people, including his non-Delaware friends, to catch up to Magua and fight the Hurons to retrieve Cora. Overall, it seems that Uncas is about as Delaware, or more specifically, Mohican, as it gets.

Significantly, however, Uncas's rightful assumption of the leadership of the Delawares is not tied to isolation from outside influence. In fact, Uncas's long separation from his Delaware relations, who have entered into alliance with the French, his comradeship with Bumpo, and his amenability to Heyward, Gamut, and Munro have surely contributed to his ability to effectively lead his people in a space of increasing cultural complexity. Rather than simply his dark skin, it is his effectiveness in a pluralistic context that makes him the appropriate match for Cora, who herself is an image of strength amid adversity as well as an embodiment of racial plurality.

While Uncas preserves the interests of his people at the same time that he battles for Cora, Cora sacrifices herself for her sister and Heyward, retaining her commitment to the judgment of God and rejecting offers of martyrdom on her behalf. Cora's moral fortitude is most poignant when at the moment of her imminent death, she turns heavenward, asserting, "I am thine! Do with me as thou seest best!" (399), leading Magua to hesitate in his mortal intentions toward her. Conflicted, "The form of the Huron trembled in every fiber, and he raised his arm on high, but dropped it again with a bewildered air, like one who doubted" (399), and it is another Huron, not he, who kills Cora. Magua thereby displays his own humanity in his struggle to decide whether to end her life, apparently moved by her faith and bravery. In this way, Magua seems to internalize Cora's example on some level, highlighting the way in which the process of mutual exchange in the novel, through which characters are affected by one another's actions and motivations, is apparent.

This transculturalization is further emphasized at the end of the novel after Cora and Uncas have been killed and are memorialized in a funeral of sorts. Six Delaware girls, who resemble Cora in appearance "with their long, dark, flowing tresses" (402), provide a positive assessment of Cora and Uncas's relationship:

"He was of a race that had once been lords on the shores of the salt lake, and his wishes had led him back to a people who dwelt about the graves of his fathers. Why should not such a predilection be encouraged! That she was of a blood purer and richer than the rest of her nation, any eye might have seen: that she was equal to the dangers and daring of a life in the woods, her conduct had proved"; and now, they added, the "wise one of the earth" had transplanted her to a place where she would find congenial spirits, and might be forever happy. (406)

Indeed, the relationship endures as the stuff of legend, as for many years afterward, their union is incorporated into the oral traditions of the Delaware, who recount the story of Cora and Uncas during "long nights and tedious marches" (412) as well as in preparation for battle.

The novel's intermingling of red, white, and black in the venerated union of Cora and Uncas is thereby significant, as it seems to enact a positive evaluation of the potential for racial and cultural confluence that has always been a distinctive reality in America. As Peck discerns, "Cooper is dealing with the relations between the three main races then inhabiting North America, and testing the possibility of their being brought together" (13). As Rosenthal explains, this hybrid crossing, especially the intermingling of white and Native, is more broadly pervasive: "The importance of miscegenation to national literature seems to be a hemispheric theme in the Americas, for many Latin American novels also figure Indian-white mixing" (122-23). Therefore, in keeping with Shari M. Huhndorf's ideas about "going Native" as a means of locating American identity, it seems that the national literary sovereignty—and perhaps cultural sovereignty—that Cooper was so eager to assert is tied to his integration of black and white with Indian in his novel. However, as many critics have so importantly asked, if Cooper sees miscegenation as key to locating a unique American identity, why did he kill off both Cora and Uncas at the end of the book?

As Mann reminds us, Cooper's historical moment was one of pervasive fear of sexuality. She concludes, "Direct discussion of any touchy subject—race or sex, especially—was worse than a crime; it was a social blunder, so Cooper's contemporaries were accustomed to following a trail of deep-throated hints to the unspeakable point" (50). By disallowing consummation of Cora and Uncas's relationship, Cooper is making a safe call. As Rosenthal points out, "Readers at that time, familiar with the myth of the Vanishing American, readily accepted plots that dissolved interracial romance by having the Indian simply vanish" (135). Similarly, Milder explains, "the issue Cooper addresses is not the sexual anxiety raised by the prospect of miscegenation . . . but the cultural anxiety surrounding the possible incorporation of the Indian and the Negro into American society" (427). As McWilliams asserts, "The Delaware maidens' song . . . calls for

an alternate vision of race and gender. . . . In 1757, in 1826, or in the 1990s, the maidens' song envisions a time that, if it ever existed, is both clearly past and not yet come again" (75). Discomfort with cross-cultural exchange surely played a prominent role in Cooper's creative decisions.

The fate of Cora is not Cooper's last word on the potential for cultural confluence in America, however. Like Cora and other characters, Hawkeye mediates among many groups in the novel, offering commentary on their various characteristics in the process. Further, Bumpo acts as a cultural interpreter of sorts, offering his evaluation, especially to the white characters, of "savage Mingos," Christianity, and the intricacies of hunting, and by the end of the novel, providing the Delawares a link to the white world. Most readers have overlooked the somewhat hidden yet nonetheless significant clues to Bumpo's more profound struggle, that of locating an identity within a world—and a rearing—that is culturally multiplicitous. Throughout, Bumpo seems hyper-concerned with estimating his own value according to sometimes disparate cultural criteria and comparing that estimation to the attributes of both Indian and white others. Bumpo's efforts at self-analysis are most evident in his relationships with other male characters, including Gamut, Heyward, Uncas, and Chingachgook.

Hawkeye's encounters with Gamut reveal his conflicted feelings about the merits of Christianity, especially relative to the life in the woods that he has long been living. Hawkeye seems to prefer a pantheistic approach to spiritual belief, though when Gamut suggests that American Indians practice idolatry, he vigorously defends American Indian worship of the Great Spirit as similar to the Christian monotheism of Gamut. Bumpo's primary complaint with Christians is apparently their reliance on written commandments rather than on experiences of God in the processes of nature. Noticing Gamut's possession of a Bible, Bumpo insists:

"[T]here are men who read in books to convince themselves there is a God. . . . 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, and that the greatest of his folly lies in striving to rise to the level of One he can never equal, be it in goodness, or be it in power." (138)

At this point, Gamut is uninterested in hearing an alternate view of religion, one that draws "'faith from the lights of nature, eschewing all subtleties of doctrine,'" and he quickly quits the conversation, believing "neither profit nor credit was to be derived" (138).

Despite Bumpo's initially negative evaluation of Gamut's beliefs, later, before the two enter battle to rescue Cora, Gamut requests that Bumpo forgive his foes should he be killed. Bumpo then provides qualified validation of Christianity. Wistfully, perhaps in recognition of his own Moravian

roots, Bumppo is clearly moved: "There is a principle in that, . . . different from the law of the woods; and yet it is fair and noble to reflect upon. . . . It is what I would wish to practice myself, as one without a cross of blood, though it is not always easy to deal with an Indian as you would with a fellow Christian" (325). Bumppo internalizes the Christian example set by Gamut, though he believes that such a lifestyle is not quite possible in the world he inhabits. However, like Bumppo, by the end of the novel, Gamut exhibits modification on some level. As the Delaware girls sing of Cora's virtues, including her Christian virtues, in a Delaware language as well as in a Delaware spiritual tradition, Gamut is also affected: "David was not reluctant to lend his ears to the tones of voices so sweet; and long ere the chant was ended, his gaze announced that his soul was enthralled" (407). Bumppo and Gamut's relationship thereby highlights boundary crossing as well as exemplifies the conflicted nature of Bumppo's self-understanding.

Similarly, Hawkeye's interactions with Heyward indicate a need for the scout to explain himself. Early in their acquaintance, Bumppo emphasizes Heyward's unfitness for a life in the woods as well as Heyward's role in European infiltration, which has instigated the hardships that the Delawares are facing. Initially, the tension between the two characters is clear, as Bumppo asserts: "I call him liar that says cowardly blood runs in the veins of a Delaware. You have driven their tribes from the seashore, and would now believe what their enemies say, that you may sleep at night upon an easy pillow." Heyward is unimpressed by Bumppo's admonition: "Heyward, perceiving that the stubborn adherence of the scout to the cause of his friends . . . was likely to prolong a useless discussion, changed the subject" (58).

However, as their journey through the forest proceeds, the two men are drawn closer together through their efforts to insure the safety of the Munro sisters. Bumppo, who has earlier exhibited a fondness for Alice upon their first meeting, responding to her with "a look of open pleasure" (45), gives Heyward his blessing before the major goes in Indian disguise to rescue—and propose—to her in the cave. Again, Bumppo apparently feels a need to assert his white lineage yet also justify his diversion from it while suggesting to Heyward that he exhibit the same kind of modification: "may Providence bless your undertaking, which is altogether for good; and remember that to outwit the knaves it is lawful to practice things that may not be naturally the gift of a white skin" (272). Therefore, like Gamut, Heyward relaxes his resistance to cultural mediation in part through his relationship to Bumppo, and Bumppo continues to promulgate his belief in his own racial purity while explaining behavior that is supposedly contradictory to it.

Heyward's alteration of his opposition to American Indians takes place largely through his relationship with Uncas, a relationship that seems to provoke the jealousy of Bumpo. Bumpo often attempts to instruct Uncas in the finer points of combat, even though Uncas clearly does not need much assistance in this area. In one instance, Bumpo's criticism of Uncas leads Heyward to intervene in defense of the young Mohican, inspiring mutual respect between the two:

"I cannot permit you to accuse Uncas of want of judgment or of skill," said Duncan. "He saved my life in the coolest and readiest manner, and he has made a friend who never will require to be reminded of the debt he owes." Uncas partly raised his body, and offered his hand to the grasp of Heyward. During this act of friendship, the two young men exchanged looks of intelligence which caused Duncan to forget the character and condition of his wild associate. (85)

While this moment is pivotal for Heyward, it provokes the envy of Hawkeye, who then begins to recount many times that he and Uncas have saved each other's lives, an exercise of attempted one-upmanship.

Uncas's positive disposition toward Heyward stems in part from his frustration with Bumpo's continual criticism, which the scout exercises in order to foreground his own skills as a hunter and warrior. While Uncas shows no outright disrespect to his avuncular companion, after Bumpo refers to Uncas's battle skills as "like that of a curious woman" (141), Heyward senses the young one's vexation: "Heyward thought the manner of the young Mohican was disdainful, if not a little fierce, and that he suppressed passions that were ready to explode" (141). Uncas's deference to Bumpo seems to proceed from a sense of pity. For example, during their execution of their costume-swapping escape plan, Bumpo acknowledges Uncas's superior faculties in assuming the guise of a bear. Uncas declines to corroborate Bumpo's evaluation, however: "... his grave countenance manifested no opinion of his own superiority" (323). Throughout scenes such as this, Uncas proves to be a humble budding leader, but he also appears to have a need to appease Bumpo, as if he understands that the scout possesses a fair amount of insecurity about his role in the surviving community of Mohicans.

Bumpo's insecurity is due in part to his separation from the father-son bond that Uncas and Chingachgook share. Though the shared respect among the three characters is apparent, there is still a Mohican identity that is difficult for Bumpo to adopt, despite his Mohican-fashioned livelihood. Observing Uncas and Chingachgook together, Bumpo's feeling of removal from them is clear: "It appeared to him as though the foresters had some secret means of intelligence, which had escaped the vigilance of his own

faculties" (231). This separation is also evident in the way in which the two Mohicans' relaxation of their warrior strength only takes place apart from Bumpo:

[B]efore the hard breathing of the scout announced that he slept, a complete change was effected in the manner of his two associates. . . . The eyes of the father followed the plastic and ingenious movements of the son with open delight, and he never failed to smile in reply to the other's contagious but low laughter. While under the influence of these gentle and natural feelings, no trace of ferocity was to be seen in the softened features of the Sagamore. (236-37)

Chingachgook's deepest kinship is with his son, and this affiliation supersedes the relationship of the Mohicans to Bumpo. At last, while Bumpo has stayed far distant from European civilization, despite his Native sensibilities, he remains conspicuously "The Deerslayer" and not an approximation of "The Nimble Deer."

As Samuels articulates, the conflict suggested by this name differentiation signals the novel's "instabilities," which "point to the violent struggle . . . to locate personhood" (88). Accordingly, Bumpo's constant comparison to Heyward and Gamut in one instant and the Mohicans in another is a reflection of his continual efforts to locate an identity in a space of mediated borders. Bumpo's mannerisms, which also vary according to his purposes, demonstrate this pluralistic identity. In one instance, during a debate with Uncas and Chingachgook about whether to journey by land or water, Heyward observes that Bumpo "affect[s] the cold and artificial manner which characterizes all classes of Anglo-Americans, when unexcited" (235). Yet moments later, when he seems to be losing the argument, Bumpo "suddenly assume[s] the manner of an Indian, and adopt[s] all the arts of native eloquence" (236), which finally lead the others to act according to his conviction.

Similarly, Bumpo's insistence on flaunting the "purity" of his whiteness amid his pronouncements about the "true" nature of Indians, including the dastardly dispositions of the Iroquois, further implies the scout's persistent attempts to delineate an identity as Anglo at times and as Delaware at others. A close reading of the text reveals the "gleam of resentment" (216) on the face of Chingachgook when Bumpo, during his rail against the French and pledge of revenge, hypocritically pins such vengeful tendencies on Natives while again asserting his European ancestry: "Revenge is an Indian feeling, and all who know me know that there is no cross in my veins" (216). As Becker-Theye observes, "When closely examined, the contrast between evil Iroquois and good Delawares is mainly a rhetorical prejudice of Hawkeye. . . . Although it is true that the word savage is applied at least 53 times to the

Iroquois and only twice to the Delaware, it is Natty Bumppo, not Cooper, who is most fond of the term" (55).

Bumppo's obsession with proving his white legitimacy while also demonstrating hunting and battle skills that are commensurate with the Mohicans is crucial to understanding his characterization; indeed, unlike Cora's determined resolve, Bumppo's disposition seems to be the most conflicted in the novel. Critics have provided many explanations for this conflicted portrayal, the most popular being that Bumppo finds himself to be morally superior to and therefore severed from European society, yet not quite savage enough—through blood or culture—to be Indian. Despite the reams of critical attention devoted to Cooper's *Leatherstocking* novels over the years, including articles focusing on Cora's miscegenation, few have suggested a probable cause of Bumppo's role as a sometimes reluctant cultural mediator: his own biracial heritage.

Mann suggests the possibility of Bumppo's miscegenation because of the historical realities, specifically many accurate references to the tribal societies of the Iroquois Confederacy, which pervade Cooper's works, particularly *The Last of the Mohicans*. Mann argues that a concentration on Cooper's European sources has precluded necessary attention to his sources in indigenous America, which make many parts of the novel, such as Cooper's portrayal of intertribal conflicts and Native leadership systems, in addition to his characterization of Magua and Bumppo, much more significant in the development of a uniquely American literature. Rejecting the views of Jane Tompkins and Richard Slotkin, who depict the novel as simply a call for the regeneration of white culture by an ineffectual and unsophisticated adventure writer, Mann draws upon these overlooked but compelling considerations in her conclusion that "Cooper knew exactly what he was doing" (56).

Mann's evidence for Hawkeye's miscegenation is chiefly based in Cooper's consultation of the writings of the eighteenth-century missionary to the Woodland Indians of the Northeast, John Heckewelder. According to Mann, "Antebellum readers, itching to scandalize their own prurience, . . . knew the code. . . the very mention of 'Moravians'—especially of any still out in the bush—screamed 'naughty sex' to American readers. . . . Moravian missionaries were known to marry Indians and recognize their cross-blooded off-spring" (50). Additionally, Mann explains that the Mohican group of the Delawares, after being forced to give up their mid-Atlantic homelands, were pushed into the area of the Iroquois, their traditional enemies, and subsumed into the Iroquois Confederacy. One group of these Mohican/Delawares, known as "Moravian" Delaware, mistakenly thinking that Moravian missionaries were offering the adoption and full protection of white society in addition to Christianity, returned to the mid-Atlantic with

the missionaries and unsuccessfully attempted to secede from the Iroquois Confederacy (55). Bumppo's division from the white world and affiliation with Uncas and Chingachgook thereby have historical relevance, as well as does Bumppo's characterization as both Anglo and Indian.

One may probe Mann's assessment further by unveiling the clues to Bumppo's heritage that are observable in the text itself. First, Bumppo's tiresome reminders of his white purity suggest that he is protesting too much. Further, Bumppo's appearance contradicts the character's evaluation of himself as of the same background as Gamut and Heyward. The novel's epigraph is crucial to this portrayal: "Mislike me not for my complexion, / The shadowed livery of the burnished sun" (iii). While some may conclude that this line refers to Cooper's American Indians, it is instead most analogous to Bumppo's appearance. In comparing Bumppo to Chingachgook, Cooper writes: "While one of these loiterers showed the red skin and wild accouterments of a native of the woods, the other exhibited, through the mask of his rude and nearly savage equipments, the brighter though sunburnt and long-faded complexion of one who might claim descent from a European parentage" (32). Notably, Cooper avoids calling Bumppo "white"; instead, the scout looks like one who may *claim descent from Europeans*. Such a formulation leaves room for Indians among Bumppo's ancestors.

Reading Bumppo this way, as an Indian-white cross-blood, makes his behavior at various points in the novel, including his efforts to establish legitimacy among a duality of peoples, more logical. In particular, his decision not to go for Alice, as well as his regretful head-shaking after Heyward departs to propose to her, are solidly based in the taboos of American society, which endure to this day. In this way, rather than viewing Bumppo as a "moral hermaphrodite of the wilderness," according to Balzac's formulation, it is more accurate to understand the character as prevented from cultivating a relationship with a white woman like Alice as well as hesitant to pursue an Indian or African American woman because of his desire not to blow his cover as a "purely white" man. As Mann reminds us, "A self-hater, as any Indian Natty must be, would eschew marriage with an Indian while avoiding sexual relations with white women—a lynching offense for a slave or an Indian at the time. An Indian Hawk-eye lived and died alone simply because the risks of romance outweighed the benefits" (53).

Bumppo's responses to the events at the end of the novel also resonate anew in a reading of the character as a cross-blood. When the Delaware girls sing of the promise of Cora and Uncas's union, the scout again shakes his head, "like one who knew the error of their simple creed" (407). Likewise, when Munro instructs Bumppo to communicate to the Delaware girls his belief that "'the times shall not be distant when we may assemble around this throne without the distinction of sex, or rank, or color,'" Bumppo re-

plies, "To tell them this would be to tell them that the snows come not in the winter, or that the sun shines fiercest when the trees are stripped of their leaves" (411). Although Tompkins and Fiedler conclude that Bumppo's responses indicate his horror of miscegenation, it is at least as plausible that they highlight his all-too-personal understanding of the implications of this miscegenation for one such as himself. For Bumppo, the creed itself is not the error; it is the simplicity of that creed that is problematic. Since they are dead, Cora and Uncas, and more importantly, their progeny, no longer have to face the prospect of rearing multiracial progeny in a world apart from the transcultural zone they have inhabited over the course of the novel. Bumppo has indeed struggled with this multiraciality himself, and like Cora, he has gone to great lengths to prevent it from being exposed.

Finally, however, standing beside Chingachgook at the grave of Uncas, Bumppo seems to modify his attempts to distance himself from Indian blood lineage and finally approaches acceptance of both aspects of his identity. As Chingachgook decries his solitary existence without Uncas, Bumppo reassures him. "Gazing with a yearning look at the rigid features of his friend, with something like his own self-command, but whose philosophy could endure no longer," Bumppo implores:

"No, Sagamore, not alone. The gifts of our colors may be different, but God has so placed us as to journey in the same path. I have no kind, and I may also say, like you, no people. He was your son, and a redskin by nature; and it may be that your blood was nearer—but if I ever forget the lad who has so often fought at my side in war, and slept at my side in peace, may He who made us all, whatever may be our color or our gifts, forget me! The boy has left us for a time; but, Sagamore, you are not alone." (414)

More than a pledge of friendship, this passage is Bumppo's revelation that though Chingachgook, as a full-blood possesses blood "nearer" to Uncas's, Bumppo also at least partially embodies a shared Indian heritage, perhaps one based in blood lineage. Thus, the process of transculturalization that has led other characters to change, however modestly, their rigid conceptions of their racial or cultural identities within a narrative that forces hybridity or "collision," has also impelled Bumppo to re-characterize his own identity.

Cooper's Leatherstocking novels will never be the authority on American Indians of the eighteenth century or their contact with other peoples in the formative years of the United States. For accuracy and relevancy in understanding the experiences of America's indigenous peoples during earlier centuries, it is imperative that students and scholars turn their attention to the early writings of American Indians⁴ such as Samson Occum, William

Apess, John Rollin Ridge, Sarah Winnemucca, Charles Alexander Eastman, and Elias Boudinot. However, *The Last of the Mohicans* is nonetheless worthy of study because of its unique fictional emphasis on the convergence of black, Indian, and white peoples, a cross-cultural contact that highlights key concerns such as integration, land and ecology, and identity, in the American imagination.

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Notes

¹ According to Stelio Cro, the Italian humanist Peter Martyr, the first historian of the "discovery," articulated beliefs that Europeans could themselves become closer to perfection through their affiliation with and mastery of what they perceived to be human embodiments of nature; in short, the "new man" would be superior to the old one, becoming "the symbol of a new era, the era of individual freedom" (396). In this way, American Indians—or perceptions of them—have allowed Europeans to formulate not only a vision of liberty, which is the foundation for their new society, but also a unique, innocent identity in a world that is far removed from Europe.

² As Shari Huhndorf, as well as Monika Kaup and Debra J. Rosenthal, eloquently explain, these encounters encompass a need for those of European origin to legitimize their presence in America. Huhndorf asserts: "These fundamental contradictions in American identity . . . reemerge again and again in the cultural imagination. It is, perhaps, for this reason that European Americans have always been obsessed with stories of the nation's origins, repeatedly retelling and refiguring their collective past in self-justifying ways" (11). Huhndorf's landmark text *Going Native, Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* akin to Philip Deloria's *Playing Indian*, concentrates on the way in which, coinciding with the military conquest of Native America in the latter half of the nineteenth century and extending well into the twentieth century, European Americans have permanently appropriated Native culture in order to vitalize and enforce a unique national identity because of ambivalence about modernity. According to Huhndorf, "Going native . . . expresses European America's anxiety about the conquest and serves in part to recast this terrible history by creating the illusion of white society's innocence. At the same time, these events also assert white dominance" (21).

³ Donelle N. Dreese discusses "reterritorialization" primarily as it applies to contemporary American Indian literatures, but her theories seem nonetheless pertinent to Cooper's portrayals of American Indians' connection to land and environment.

⁴ Timothy B. Powell's *Ruthless Democracy: A Multicultural Interpretation of the American Renaissance* endeavors to reconfigure the American Renaissance, including "canonical" writers, within a multicultural context.

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