

Land, Law and Faith: Discourses of Liberty in James Fenimore Cooper's *The  
Pioneers, The Last of the Mohicans, and The Crater*

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York  
College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

May 18, 2002

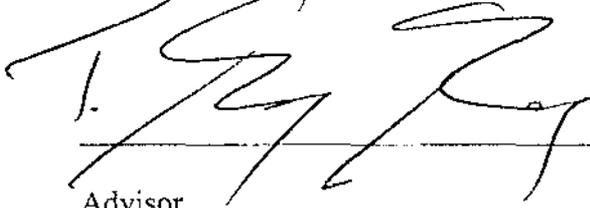
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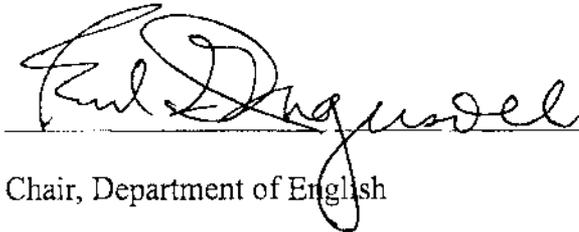
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Chair, Department of English

Dedicated to the men in my life:

Daryl - for all your love and support. YTC.

Andy and Matt - for always understanding when Mommy was in her “post office”  
writing. Love you. Love you.

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Abstract

This thesis deals with James Fenimore Cooper's beliefs regarding the strengths and weaknesses of American democracy as expressed through his fiction. While many critics feel Cooper's belief in the American system soured in his later years, this thesis seeks to prove he not only remained consistent in his views, but that those views, while at times critical of American politics, were largely optimistic.

This thesis will focus on two early novels, *The Pioneers* (1823), and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), as well as one of Cooper's last novels, *The Crater* (1847). In both the early novels as well as in *The Crater*, Cooper seeks to display the weaknesses in the American systems of democracy and capitalism through discussions centering on the land and the law. In both *The Pioneers*, and *Mohicans*, Cooper focuses on the ownership of the land and its resources as well as on the right to make laws and govern one's own destiny. In *The Crater*, Cooper endorses his belief in America's governmental and economic systems, as well as clarifies his fears if those systems go unchecked. As well, Cooper offers in *The Crater* a unique solution of faith as a way to check potential abuses while protecting the integrity of liberty.

Cooper's optimism is shown through his belief that his criticism of capitalism and demagoguery, while not always understood or well-received, were necessary in order to preserve a nation he felt had great strength and potential.

## Chapter One

### Cooper's Assessment of the American Experiment

As with any fiction that deals with history, many of James Fenimore Cooper's novels are a mixture of historical fact and mythical fiction. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. states in *The Cycles of American History* that:

The law of acceleration hurtles us into the inscrutable future. But it cannot wipe the slate of the past. [. . .] science and technology revolutionize our lives, but memory, tradition and myth frame our response. Expelled from individual consciousness by the rush of change, history finds its revenge by stamping the collective unconscious with habits, values, expectations, dreams. The dialectic between past and future will continue to form our lives. (xii)

These statements ring true for Cooper's writing. Cooper's world was one of constant change, discovery, and trial and error as the nation explored the fittings of democracy and freedom. Cooper's America was one not only of political change, but also of economic change, and for Cooper, these changes revolutionized his worldviews. Cooper saw the need for caution, restraint and humility in the face of such revolutionary changes as America was experiencing lest the experiment fail in its unique endeavor to become a nation of truly free individuals linked together by the common goal of democratic unity. In response, Cooper filled his fiction with both history and myth; he used the past as a setting for his novels in order to remind his readers of their unique history, and then populated them with mythical heroes such as

Natty Bumppo in order enable his readers to see the possibility of an alternate version of experience. In this way, Cooper tied the past to his vision of what America could become.

Cooper's ideas, however, have been met with mixed reviews. Cooper endured criticism both personally and professionally, but much of the criticism likely stemmed from the fact that Cooper appeared to many to be attacking American ideals. H. L. Mencken puts that idea in perspective by stating, "Cooper was probably the first American to write about Americans in a really frank spirit" (vi). Mencken further notes of *The American Democrat*, "It was not, of course, a complete repudiation of democracy, as the alarmed reviewers of the time alleged. But it went into the defects and dangers of democracy with acrid realism, and so poor Cooper got the name of a sniffish and unpatriotic fellow, and was accused of all sorts of aristocratic pretensions, immensely obnoxious to the free citizens of a free and glorious state" (vi-vii).

Dorothy Waples places much of the negative criticism of James Fenimore Cooper in the context of political slander stating, "[I]t can be demonstrated that a myth promulgated by hostile politicians has seriously affected the American conception of Cooper" (2). And she further notes that he was undoubtedly patriotic, considering his political endeavors as a duty to his country: "In James Fenimore Cooper, then, America seems to have had a novelist who took his political responsibilities with great seriousness, even with an inbred sense of *noblesse oblige*" (Waples 8). And Mencken concludes that *The American Democrat*, "is the work of a

man who had large confidence in the fundamental democratic scheme of things, despite all his qualms. He knew that democracy, even if it failed, would have some useful by-products [ . . . ]” (vii-viii).

Cooper’s writing, both fiction and non-fiction, is filled with his political views concerning America’s system of democracy and his beliefs and hopes regarding the success of what Schlesinger calls the American experiment (ix). Schlesinger notes, “The men who established the United States of America believed that they were trying something new under the sun. The idea that a democratic republic might endure ran against all the teachings of history” (ix). Cooper believed in that system, and wrote extensively both on the strengths of democracy, and on what he saw as weaknesses in the system. And while some critics feel Cooper’s belief in the American system turned sour in his latter years, both a close inspection of similar political themes in his early writing, and a better understanding of the optimism found in his later writings reveal an enduring hope for the success of the nation.

In order to understand the continuity of Cooper’s thinking, I will focus this study on two early novels, *The Pioneers* (1823), and *The Last of The Mohicans* (1826), as well as on one written during the last years of Cooper’s life, *The Crater* (1847). While the first two novels were written early in Cooper’s career and without the benefit of his hiatus in Europe (1826-33), in which he gained a unique perspective on American democracy, there are several political themes which are present in both and which carried over to his later work. For example, in both *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper is concerned with problems of land ownership, law and

authority, and with public voice. All of these issues are strongly addressed in his utopian community in *The Crater* with little change in Cooper's views of the problems created by these issues. In *The Crater*, however, Cooper adds a new dimension to his argument by offering his unique solution of faith as a way to solve the underlying problems with the democratic system. By understanding the continuity of these themes coupled with a reading of *The Crater* as a presentation of Cooper's solutions, we can understand Cooper's novels not as criticism of America, but as hope for the success of the American experiment.

In *The Pioneers*, Cooper focuses his attention on the question of the rightness of the law. While his discussion on land ownership in *The Pioneers* is concerned with the rightful ownership through inheritance and legal ownership he still manages to turn the issue into a discussion of political voice. In *The Pioneers*, Cooper asks the questions of who has the right to make the laws, and why those laws are necessary to the health of the nation. Natty Bumppo serves as the foil to Judge Temple in *The Pioneers*, and Cooper develops his political ideas regarding necessity of the law as a civilizing agent, as well as the dangers of the law in an increasingly capitalist country. Cooper uses the laws governing the conservation of resources in order to illustrate how the law can serve as a unifying force for the nation, as well as how the same law when abused can become limiting to individual freedom. And while *The Pioneers* ends with Natty ultimately squeezed out of society, Cooper is not actually making a judgment for or against the system of laws in the United States, but is rather using the distasteful thought of his beloved hero's ousting as a way to describe the dangers that

capitalistic greed could have on an individual's freedom in a nation with malleable laws. In other words, Cooper used *The Pioneers* as a way to describe how capitalism could be a threat to individual freedom, and thus a danger to the cohesion of the American republic.

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, discusses the specific challenges of merging disparate cultures. Cooper begins with his thoughts on the importance of land ownership and the importance of voice. For Cooper, the ability to have a modicum of control over one's society translates into personal and national liberty. In *Mohicans*, Cooper uses the background of The French and Indian War in order to show both the struggle between the races and the possibility of making the nation stronger through finding a common ground which included tolerance and respect for the individual cultures and peoples. Using both the friendship between Hawkeye and Chingachgook and the lessons of the minor characters such as David Gamut, Cora Munro and Uncas, Cooper is able to establish the hope of a stronger, united America firmly in the myth of his tale.

By the time Cooper wrote *The Crater* in 1847, there is a noticeable change in his writing. Contrary to popular opinion though, this change is not that Cooper had given up on America as some critics suggest, but rather that Cooper had changed his tone, reflecting more urgency for his concerns regarding the dangers he perceived to the American experiment. The other noticeable change was that in *The Crater*, Cooper begins to give definite answers to the problems of the law described in *The Pioneers*. In *The Crater*, Cooper focuses more specifically on the dangers of

capitalism gone awry as well as on the dangers of demagoguery. Both of these issues concerned the abuse and misuse of the laws of the nation solely for personal gain of money and power to the detriment of individual freedom and national cohesion. In *The Crater*, Cooper sets up a sort of utopian community both to endorse his belief in America's governmental and economic systems, as well as to clarify his fears if those systems remain unchecked in regards to potential misuses. Also different in *The Crater* is Cooper's willingness to offer an answer to the dilemma he so artfully outlines in both *Pioneers* and *Crater*. Cooper believes that by submitting to a higher law, one in accordance to his Judeo-Christian beliefs, Americans would be able to continue to operate under a constitution which allowed for necessary and warranted changes without the fear of misusing those changes. And while Cooper uses authorial choice to destroy the utopian island he created, that action alone does not point to his dissatisfaction with America, but rather the severeness and urgency of the warning he was sounding. Cooper ultimately wished for the success of the American experiment, and for this to happen, he believed, America needed to incorporate a system of moral restraints to protect the liberty of the nation.

Of the three novels discussed in this thesis, *The Crater* was the least well-received because of political smears as described by Waples as well as Cooper's countrymen feeling that Cooper was attacking the country as an outsider rather than as a patriot. Cooper, however was not only not attacking the nation, but he was in fact attempting to preserve it both by warning of the flaws he perceived and by providing concrete ideas to remedy the situation. Cooper's novels are then novels of

possibility: the possibility for America to have a national identity through the common civility and preservation of the law; the possibility for America to be a stronger nation through tolerance, unity and the acceptance of the individual; and the possibility of a stronger America through a public morality that submitted itself to a higher law in order to prevent abuses and instead create a stronger union through the preservation of liberty.

## Chapter Two

### Questions of Land and Law in *The Pioneers*

In *The Pioneers*, Cooper continues to focus on the state of American politics through his fiction. In this novel, he uses the newly established village of Templeton, based loosely on his father's town, Cooperstown, New York. In fact, there has been considerable criticism written comparing the setting of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* with his hometown of Cooperstown. From Templeton being set on the banks of Lake Otsego as is Cooperstown itself, to comparisons of Judge Templeton and William Cooper, scholars have sought to connect Cooperstown and Templeton and thus discover biographical connections or even the psychology of Cooper's personal relationships. While some of these basic comparisons might hold true, it seems Cooper went far beyond mere description of his hometown or thinly veiled biography. Hugh MacDougal, in his essay "Reading *The Pioneers* as History" states, "But though Cooper was nostalgic about the village of his childhood, he also sought to generalize about central New York frontier society, and these similarities should not be overemphasized." In fact, Cooper seems not only to be generalizing about New York frontier society, but also about the larger frame of the American experiment itself. Michael Clark compares Templeton with civilization in general. "The town of Templeton—civilization encroaching on nature—represents the antithesis of the 'temple' of nature" (230). Clark, in explaining the symbolism of the word temple, goes on to explain the straight form of the town as representing the forward progression of civilization, setting the civilization process up as a foe to the

temple of nature, describing *The Pioneers* as a sort of battle between opposing forces. While there is a certain feel of a battle for the civilizing of Templeton, Clark neglects an equally compelling meaning of the word temple, that of template. A template is “a pattern [. . .] for forming an accurate copy of an object or shape” and is from the French *templet*, a diminutive of *temple* (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*). Cooper as well points out in his introduction that his work is a “descriptive tale” and is “intended to represent a general picture” (*Pioneers* v).

Given the possibility that Templeton, and by extension *The Pioneers*, is a template of sorts, it is easy to accept MacDougall’s comments of Cooper generalizing about early New York society. It is equally appropriate, given Cooper’s life-long habit of commenting on American political issues, to state that *The Pioneers* can be read as a template of a young America. Lending weight to the argument that Cooper was trying to speak to issues in American history rather than create a biographical tale, both Nan Goodman and Brook Thomas in their separate essays establish that Cooper speaks not just to the time period of the novel’s setting, but also to the time period of the author’s own life. “The first step toward understanding the historical context of Cooper’s work is to recognize that *The Pioneers* represents not just one historical transformation but two” (Thomas 88). Goodman states, “The action of *The Pioneers* begins in 1793 [and] Cooper’s account of it is informed by the ideology and evolving legal technology of the 1820s, the period of his own professional maturity” (2). Thus as a template of American society, Cooper captures the essence of America’s political future as the action of *The Pioneers* unfolds. In fact, William P.

Kelly notes that Cooper is, “less interested in charting the direction of American time than he is in establishing standards to guide the nation’s destiny” (9). So in *The Pioneers*, Cooper, as he has in many of his novels, begins to define his opinions regarding the issues America must deal with in order to prove successful as a nation.

In an effort to parallel the America of the 1820’s, Cooper sets up a microcosm in which to pursue what he considered defining issues in America at the time, the viability of the capitalist system, the workability of the law, and their impact on the freedom of the individual. In *The Pioneers*, Cooper sets up the idea that although authority exists in varying degrees, authority in America is unique in that it can be gained through hard work and strength of character, not simply through personal connections such as birth or position. In this way, all men have equal opportunity to gain authority. Through the question of land ownership posed early in the novel, Cooper introduces the shift from personal authority towards democratic law which he believes is necessary to preserve both the equal rights of all citizens and thus the future well-being of the nation. Specifically, Cooper illustrates this shift and its necessity through the opposing views on conservation laws as tied to ownership of the land. Cooper incorporates into this discussion specific concerns over capitalism and the rights of the individual, especially in instances of misuse of the law. Most of these issues are presented by Cooper through the events of two scenes in the novel.

The first is the opening scene of the novel in which Judge Temple stops his sleigh in order to shoot a deer he has spotted running through the woods. After the deer falls, Natty Bumppo and Oliver Edwards emerge from the woods, and an

argument ensues over which hunter actually killed the deer. Judge Temple carries out a sort of mock trial, but Natty cuts it short by explaining that not only did the Judge not kill the deer, but he actually injured Oliver Edwards in his attempt. Temple makes one last half-hearted argument regarding his right to the deer by mentioning both his ownership of the land on which the deer was shot and his generosity in allowing Natty free access to hunt on that land. Natty rebuts the Judge's claims and Temple submits to Edward's right to the deer, trying instead to purchase it from Edwards. Oliver refuses to sell, and Elizabeth Temple ends the conversation by focusing on Oliver's wounds. The scene ends with Edwards consenting to accompany Elizabeth and the Judge to their home to receive medical attention.

The second pivotal scene comes midway through the novel and informs the action of the second half of the story. In it, Hiram Doolittle sets Natty's hounds loose who then scent out a deer. Natty pursues and kills the deer even though it is out of season according to Judge Temple's new game laws. The offense is witnessed and investigated by Doolittle, and eventually Natty is brought to trial. This offense proves to be the undoing of Natty and the destruction of his way of living in the forests of Templeton.

While the first scene deals with issues of ownership, authority and capitalism, the second delves into the divide between the necessity for the law and the rights and freedom of the individual. At its heart, *The Pioneers* illustrates the progression in America from the rule of personal authority to the establishment of a civil, encompassing law as a necessary force to protect and preserve the freedom of the

individual in a progressively capitalist society. Cooper sets up *The Pioneers* as a template of American society in order to address these issue of the necessity of a social law through discussions of land ownership, conservation and commerce, and he does so in such a was as to comment on the necessity of striking a balance between law and personal freedom in order to ensure the future viability of the nation.

Before discussing the particulars of Cooper's arguments regarding the future of America, it is important to understand some of his ideas regarding authority. In *The Pioneers*, authority is an overriding theme – Cooper establishes early on that not only does authority exist, but it exists on many levels and in varying degrees. Early in the novel, Cooper attempts to explain to the reader in his description of Marmaduke Temple some of the ironies of American power:

It is [. . .] a subject of curious inquiry at the present day to look into the brief records of that early period and observe how regular, and with few exceptions how inevitable, were the gradations, on the one hand, of the masters to poverty, and on the other, of their servants to wealth. Accustomed to ease and unequal to the struggles incident to an infant society, the affluent emigrant was barely enabled to maintain his own rank by the weight of his personal superiority and acquirements; but the moment that his head was laid in the grave, his indolent and comparatively uneducated offspring were compelled to yield precedency to the more active energies of a class whose exertions had been stimulated by necessity. (*Pioneers* 27-28)

Cooper establishes with this observation that power is distributed and attained differently in the new world of America; in America power can be attained by personal energy and an industrious character. Old standards of family name and wealth were not on their own enough to secure social class or levels of authority. Alexis de Tocqueville describes this difference in relation to paternal authority. He notes, “[A]s soon as the young American approaches manhood, the ties of filial obedience are relaxed day by day [. . .] at the close of boyhood the man appears and begins to trace out his own path” (*Democracy in America* 2: 192). And he continues with, “Under democratic laws, all children are perfectly equal and consequently independent [. . .]” (2: 196). So, instead of following the political and social paths of one’s father, in the American society each is able to create both his own beliefs and his own level of power through industry and effort. But Cooper points out that while even in America’s infancy power and authority held a place in society, and while traditional class rankings might not exist in the new world, levels of authority certainly did.

Cooper illustrates these levels of authority in several ways. When his daughter returns to live at the mansion house, Judge Temple pointedly tells Remarkable Pettybone, the housekeeper, that she must address Elizabeth as *Miss*. When Remarkable responds in surprise and begins to oppose this order, Judge Temple quickly shuts down her argument and as he “looked seriously displeased” and “carried a particularly commanding air” Remarkable made no reply (*Pioneers* 101-02). While Remarkable later complains to Ben Pump that she should not have to

address Elizabeth as *Miss*, there is no further mention that she ever calls her anything else. So while Remarkable feels she is on the same level as the Temples, she clearly knows who holds the authority. Cooper also shows Cousin Richard pulling rank as it were on the servant Aggy in order to discover that Judge Temple hadn't really killed the deer as he had implied to Richard. While these and other similar instances in the novel illustrate Cooper's concern with authority and power, none show it more clearly than his treatment of Judge Temple himself. Cooper has Richard Jones refer to Judge Temple as "Duke" as a nickname, clearly implying aristocracy and all its trappings. Cooper writes, "In truth, the occupants of these favored habitations were the nobles of Templeton, as Marmaduke was its king" (*Pioneers* 39).

Cooper uses this symbolism to point to the special position of power that Marmaduke Temple held not only as founder of the town, but also as its judge. In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville describes the power of the American judge as, "exactly the same as that of the magistrates of other nations; and yet he is invested with immense political power. [. . .] [The difference] lies in the simple fact that the Americans have acknowledged the right of the judges to found their decisions on the *Constitution* rather than on the *laws*" (1: 100). And he further states, "In America the Constitution may therefore vary; but as long as it exists, it is the origin of all authority, and the sole vehicle of the predominating force" (*Democracy in America* 1:100). Cooper acknowledges the unique power of the Constitution and its ministers, and Judge Temple is certainly drawn as the predominating force in Templeton. In essence, *The Pioneers* is a working out of Judge Temple's authority,

and by extension, the democratic system of the United States, and Cooper's first exploration into this authority is seen in issues of land ownership.

In fact, the issue of land ownership comes up almost immediately in *The Pioneers* as mentioned in that first hunting scene. While Natty, Edwards and Judge Temple argue over who shot the deer, Judge Temple in order to gain leverage brings up the fact that he owns the land and has allowed them to hunt there in the first place. Instead of being grateful though, Natty bristles at the suggestion replying, "There's them living who say that Nathaniel Bumppo's right to shoot on these hills is of older date than Marmaduke Temple's right to forbid him" (*Pioneers* 23). Thus Cooper has planted questions in the reader's mind not only of land ownership, but also questions of the law's ability to rule. In other words, Natty is actually questioning the legal system itself and appealing to what he feels is the higher court of natural order and possibly to the Indian's original rights to the land. This is evidenced by Oliver Edwards' presence in the scene. Oliver is later discovered to be Edward Effingham, Major Effingham's grandson and legal heir to Temple's land which had been granted to Effingham by the Indians. So in this one scene, Cooper has not only introduced a central theme of land ownership and personal rights, but has also questioned the law itself by questioning the validity of Temple's claim.

Douglas Buchholz states that this scene establishes, "ownership of the land and its resources as the decisive theme in *The Pioneers*" (95), but it is equally possible given Cooper's fairly light treatment and easy wrap up of the issue by novel's end that land ownership is merely a part of his message. In fact, given

Cooper's nature and tendency towards exploring both sides of any issue, it is difficult to call any one theme his "decisive" and "central" theme: Rather, it seems that Cooper uses the issue of land ownership as a springboard for discussion on a number of interrelated topics such as conservation, capitalism and finally the law itself.

Cooper introduces the discussion on conservation through Natty Bumppo. After he questions the validity of Judge Temple's claim to the land, Natty states, "But if there's a law about it all [ . . . ] it should be to keep people from the use of smoothbores. A body never knows where his lead will fly when he pulls the trigger of one of them uncertain firearms" (*Pioneers* 23). Natty's speech serves to open the discussion on conservation and conservation laws, and also anticipates the waste of the settlers in the later pigeon shoot and net fishing showing the need for these laws. E. Arthur Robinson calls conservation a "pervasive" subject in *The Pioneers* (566), and notes there are three groupings of people in the novel. The first, including most of the settlers in the community, are those who, "believe that natural resources exist for their personal benefit to be utilized, wasted, or destroyed as they see fit" (566). This group is strongly represented by Marmaduke's cousin, Richard Jones, and they believe in what Nelson Van Valen would call the, "myth of superabundance" (294). The other two groupings in the novel agree that some form of conservation is needed in order to protect the resources, but agree for very different reasons. These groups, according to Robinson, are best represented by Natty and Judge Temple.

While Natty Bumppo introduces the concept of conservation to the novel, his views are extremely narrow and limiting in regards to nature. Robinson points out his

views are, “a compound of sentiment and practicality” (573). Obviously practical uses of nature for Natty are very important to his survival, but he is also quite sentimental in his attachment toward the natural world far beyond any of his counterparts. For Natty, nature is closer to his religion than even just a livelihood. Van Valen states, “Natty’s fundamental commitments are aesthetic and spiritual; the woods are his art gallery and his church” (302). Thus, as a sort of spiritual refuge for Natty, the woods and all of nature are sacred, and any destruction or wanton use is unacceptable. Natty has created a mutually beneficial relationship with nature. In fact, even his house blends seamlessly into the hillside. Michael Clark points out, “Natty’s dwelling is characterized as blending in with the landscape. [. . .] There is no evidence here of man tampering with nature; rather, to enter Natty’s hut Edwards ‘entered the shadow.’ Natty’s refuge is in nature’s umbra” (228).

For Natty, it comes dangerously close to a sin to take more from nature than one actually needs. It is distressing for Natty to watch the settlers cut down tree after tree, fish with drag nets catching more than anyone could ever use, and shoot pigeons by the hundred. In fact, when Dickon uses a cannon to shoot the pigeons, Natty can no longer keep silent:

“This comes of settling a country!” he said. “Here have I known the pigeons to fly for forty long years, and, till you made your clearings, there was nobody to skear or to hurt them. I loved to see them come into the woods, for they were company to a body; hurting nothing; being as it was, as harmless as a garter snake. But now it gives me

sore thoughts when I hear the frighty things whizzing through the air, for I know its only a motion to bring out all the brats in the village.

Well! the Lord won't see the waste of his creatures for nothing, and right will be done to the pigeons, as well as others, by and by."

*(Pioneers 235)*

After Natty illustrates his point by shooting a pigeon with only one shot, he states, "It's much better to kill only such as you want, without wasting your powder and lead, than to be firing into God's creatures in this wicked manner. [. . .] I don't relish to see these wasty ways that you all are practysing, as if the least thing wasn't made for use, and not to destroy" (*Pioneers 237*).

Natty's speech spells out his views that nature is sacred and made for use on an as needed basis and that the "wasty ways" of the pioneers are sinful. More importantly though, is that he raises issues of commerce and capitalism. He talks not only of wasting the resources of nature, but also of wasting man-made resources like lead and powder. Earlier, he stated he would support a law against the use of the smoothbore which scatters its shot in hopes of hitting a target negating the need for careful aim. While Natty is opposed to clearing the woods for agricultural pursuits, he is equally appalled at a capitalist society which feels the waste of man-made resources is a justified expense for recreation. In fact, Richard Jones, in response to Marmaduke's expression of guilt after Natty's speech, replies, "Sport! [. . .] it is princely sport" (*Pioneers 239*). Cooper uses this to illustrate two very different ways

of thinking – Natty’s survivalist conservation, and Jones’ capitalist ideas of the worth of recreation – that have collided as Templeton progresses towards civilization.

Cooper uses Dickon’s next offense, fishing with a net, to show the subtleties between Natty’s and Judge Temple’s positions on conservation. Dickon is fishing with a net, dragging in more fish than the whole town could eat before it would spoil, and both Natty and Marmaduke protest his methods. After Natty speaks up against Richard, Judge Temple replies, “Your reasoning is mine: for once, old hunter, we agree in opinion” (*Pioneers* 254), but instead of embracing Temple’s position, Natty simply corrects him. “No, no; we are not much of one mind, Judge, or you’d never turn good hunting grounds into stumpy pastures” (*Pioneers* 254). And Natty is right. While Judge Temple does try to reign in Richard’s wasteful ways and does believe in conserving the resources of Templeton, he does so with extremely different motivations than Natty’s. Robinson states, “Put simply, Judge Temple is an exponent of the view, now conventional but rare in Cooper’s day, of preserving natural resources with an eye to the future” (568). In fact the Judge’s reasons for conservation are very commercial.

In chapter nine, the scene opens with the Christmas feast, replete with “a cheerful fire, of the hard or sugar maple [. . .] burning on the hearth” (100). The Judge immediately notices the sugar maple fire and lights into his cousin:

“How often have I forbidden the use of the sugar maple in my dwelling! The sight of that sap, as it exudes with the heat, is painful to me, Richard. Really, it behoves the owner of woods so extensive as

mine to be cautious what example he sets his people, who are already felling the forest as if no end could be found to their treasures, nor any limits to their extent. If we go on this way, twenty years hence we shall want fuel.” (*Pioneers* 100)

Not only is the Judge aware of his citizens felling trees at an alarming rate, but he is also specific about which trees he personally burns simply for heat. Temple does back off when Dickon explains he used the sugar maple solely for Elizabeth’s pleasure, but it is important to note that part of Judge Temple’s complaint arose out of the much better use of the sugar maples to produce sugar. In fact, later in the novel Judge Temple leads an expedition to see Billy Kirby’s sugar operation where we learn that Temple actually has a business interest in sugar production:

“Thou art very right, Richard,” observed Marmaduke, with a gravity in his air that proved how much he was interested in the subject. “It is very true that we manufacture sugar, and the inquiry is quite useful, how much? and in what manner? I hope to live to see the day when farms and plantations shall be devolved to this branch of business. Little is known concerning the properties of the tree itself, the source of all this wealth [. . .].” (*Pioneers* 211-12)

Cooper uses Judge Temple to provide a rough model of the shrewd businessman who understands and is able to envision the potential of the resources before him. It is obvious that Cooper is stressing both the commercial uses of the maple trees as well as the importance of the proper conservation of these resources. Van Valen states,

“Temple treasures the precious jewels of the forest only for their worth in narrow economic terms” (299). Through Temple, Cooper shows himself a strong proponent of the advance of civilization through conservation laws that would support a strong, capitalist society.

Brook Thomas argues that Cooper was in favor of a more agrarian system stating, “Cooper’s vision of the ideal republic remained agrarian. While he included manufacturing in his opening description, he placed it in a pastoral setting. Cooper [. . .] distrusted the commercial class” (93). While the setting of *The Pioneers* is more agrarian, and the arguments between Judge Temple and Natty center around the clearing of the forest for the purpose of farming, Thomas fails to take into account both the idea that Templeton is in transition and heading towards a more capitalistic state, and the fact that Judge Temple displays a keen sense of business and seems to look further into the future than any of his settlers. For example, in revisiting the maple sugaring scenes, the reader witnesses Temple speaking to his cousin of his plans to find better production methods to both protect the trees and increase the quality of the sugar. “‘The first object of my solicitude, friend Jones,’ returned Marmaduke, ‘is to protect the sources of this great mine of comfort and wealth from the extravagance of the people themselves. When this important point shall be achieved, it will be in season to turn our attention to an improvement in the manufacture of the article’” (210). Judge Temple also reveals he has already begun to refine the sugar to make it whiter, which would of course make it more appealing than Billy Kirby’s one-pot, brown sugar to the more cultured members of society.

Cooper provides many examples of commerce in *The Pioneers* such as Judge Temple's fascination with the sugar business, his attempts to purchase Edwards' deer after failing to prove the right to it, the presence of Monsieur LeQuois, a personal friend of Judge temple and a merchant, and Judge Temple's turning the pigeon fiasco into an economic opportunity for the village boys by paying them to collect the heads of the fallen birds. Given these examples, it would seem that Cooper is not as distrustful of the commercial class as Thomas states, rather, in the character of Judge Temple, Cooper begins to hint at what he eventually warns about in *The Crater* – that without proper laws, the commercial class might overstep their bounds and cause an imbalance of freedom and rights which would potentially ruin the democratic system of America. As Robinson states, "The Judge's concern is not with the pristine forest but with husbanding its useful qualities for the benefit of approaching civilization. Hence it is natural for him to turn to civilized techniques of law and increase regulation in seeking a remedy for the settlers' wastefulness" (571). After observing Billy Kirby's wasteful processes, Marmaduke warns him that soon the law will protect America's future:

"Opinions on such subjects vary much in different countries," said Marmaduke; "but it is not as ornaments that I value the noble trees of this country; it is for their usefulness. We are stripping the forests, as if a single year would replace what we destroy. But the hour approaches when the laws will take notice of not only the woods, but the game they contain also." (*Pioneers* 219)

Through *Marmaduke*, Cooper drives home his point that laws are necessary not only to protect the present inhabitants, but also to protect future generations from possible irresponsible uses of the resources. Cooper understands that in order for America to remain a strong nation, its future inhabitants must enjoy the same level of freedom and abundance that its present inhabitants enjoy. In pointing out the necessity for these conservation laws, Cooper plants the seeds of the tension between the necessity for America to become a stronger nation through capitalism and the dangers inherent in that system.

Nan Goodman explains that it is this capitalist tension that underpins the whole land argument between Natty and Judge Temple. She states, “In depicting the process from pre-capitalism to capitalism, Cooper inevitably gives Temple the upper hand. In designating Temple as the scion of the new society, the novel acknowledges the exigencies of an industrial society which could not, among other things, assume the general accessibility of resources on which Natty’s theory depends” (5). By novel’s end, Natty leaves Templeton symbolizing the end of the frontier way of life, and Edwards and Elizabeth marry inheriting Judge Temple’s land leaving the reader with a symbolic hope of a successful, more civilized future. But before Cooper winds up his tale with this romantic conclusion, he warns of the possibility of the corruption of the capitalist system.

Cooper recognized that capitalism was America’s future, but left unregulated, that it could also be its stumbling block. Cooper introduces this idea of capitalism run amok with the picture of Richard Jones in the opening scenes of the novel driving his

horses towards the Temple mansion. Richard carelessly attempts to turn his horses at the quarry without unhitching the two lead horses. In maneuvering four horses in an area difficult for even two, Richard loses control and ends up with the sleigh half over a precipice and near disaster. Luckily Oliver Edwards manages to catch the reigns and jerk the horses forward, saving Richard and his passengers (*Pioneers* 46-47).

Cooper actually writes the scene with quite a bit of humor, with the sleigh passengers ejected into snow banks and such, but Cooper actually provides a stunning visual of the dangers of “unbridled” capitalistic greed. It is no coincidence that has opportunistic Richard at the helm when the misfortune occurs, and it is Richard and his cronies that Cooper uses to illustrate the dangers of the capitalistic system.

Charles Hansford Adams writes, “Cooper recognizes [in *The Pioneers*] that if the legal forms sometimes corrupt private motives, the institution may also be corrupted by private greed” (57). And indeed, this is what happens in *The Pioneers* as Richard’s desire for Natty’s supposed silver motivates his plot against Natty, eventually causing the destruction of Natty’s way of life. Cooper very pointedly illustrates how the rights of some can be trampled by unchecked capitalism.

For Cooper, the answer to this dilemma, though imperfect, is the law. The only way to protect the individual, or at least the majority of individuals, is through democratic law. In *The Pioneers*, all of Cooper’s arguments regarding land ownership, conservation and even capitalist society come back to the issue of the law. The second deer hunting scene in which Natty is trapped by Hiram Doolittle into breaking the law (both in killing the deer out of season and by impeding an

investigation), results in a court trial to determine Natty's guilt or innocence regarding the community's laws. Cooper uses this situation in the novel in order to establish the primacy of the law, nearly to the point of elevating the law to character status. Alexis de Tocqueville states, "In no country in the world does the law hold so absolute a language as in America" (*Democracy in America* 1: 71). In giving the law a voice and a language, as Cooper does, he confers on it a certain power over the other characters.

In fact, by the time Natty is defending himself in the trial, it is apparent that not only has he lost his voice since he can not understand the language of the law, but also Judge Temple has lost control when the rigidity of the law takes over. The loss of Natty's voice is witnessed in the trial, in which Natty from beginning to end is frustrated in his attempts to make his case. At one point, Natty insists on being heard, shouting, "Hear me, Marmaduke Temple [. . .] and hear reason" (*Pioneers* 354), but what follows is a personal appeal to the Judge's reason and not an appeal to the law. For Judge Temple, the case is far beyond his personal authority, and he rules in keeping with the democratic law which he feels is the saving force of Templeton. He defends his decision to Elizabeth stating, "[T]he sanctity of the laws must be respected. [. . .] Society cannot exist without security and respect to the persons of those who administer them; and it would sound ill indeed to report that a judge had extended favor to a convicted criminal because he had saved the life of his child" (*Pioneers* 364). And thus Marmaduke's assurances to Elizabeth that Leatherstocking, "shall be safe in my care" (312), quickly give way to, "Our plans are defeated, girl;

the 'obstinaey of the Leatherstocking' has brought down the indignation of the law on his head, and it is now out of my power to avert it" (328).

The law for Judge Temple, and certainly for Cooper, is important because it provides Templeton, and by extension America, with a sense of identity. Adams states, "In the swarm of ethnic and religious groups and subgroups, law provided an established framework for social intercourse. The law with its precise description of the obligations of each to each, and its formidable array of rituals designed to enforce those bonds, reduced social friction in a world characterized by competing codes of behavior" (5). In essence, the law was meant to provide a means of common unifying discussion between the settlers. This meant for the pioneers that they would in turn have ultimately to submit to the law or depart. People like Billy Kirby for example, would have eventually to submit to the coming conservation laws, and Natty would have to respect the game laws. In order for the community to progress, each citizen would need to advance toward his or her goals within the protective and unifying framework of the law.

Even though Judge Temple wishes he could protect Natty, believing that Natty does not deserve to go to prison, he allows the trial to go forward. Cooper uses Natty's trial to illustrate his belief in the necessity of the law as a replacement for the personal authority of Judge Temple. Daryl E. Jones states, "But to the wilderness that Natty has known [. . .] historical change has brought an advancing civilization and the need for legal forms to curb the excess of men less principled than Natty" (75). Even Judge Temple acknowledges that Natty is a unique individual, capable of existing

without the need for external restrictions. “‘Thou art an exception, Leatherstocking,’ returned the Judge, nodding good-naturedly to the hunted; ‘for thou hast a temperance unusual in thy class, and a hardihood exceeding thy years’” (*Pioneers* 193). Natty is resourceful, honest, and above all, self-governed, but he is unique. The vast majority of Templeton’s pioneers are in need of some sort of external limitations; from Hiram Doolittle and Richard Jones who would sooner act against a man in order to secure their own fortunes, to Billy Kirby who good-naturedly hacks down trees in the process of making a bit of sugar, some level of law is needed in order to create a livable community in which the rights and resources are protected from those less principled than Natty.

Unfortunately for Natty, he was unable or unwilling to submit to the civilizing forces of the law, and through the trial he is eventually squeezed out of Templeton. Cooper symbolizes this in the loss of Natty’s most individualistic quality, his voice. Wayne Franklin states, “Leatherstocking establishes his presence in the novel by his garrulous insistence: it is right that his sounds are the first to set the world of *The Pioneers* going. Yet the great majority of his words are speeches rather than exchanges. His voice is lyric rather than social, the articulation of a silence brooding in the landscape” (90). Natty is not at all interested in “social intercourse” as Adams calls it, rather he simply wants to live as he has for the previous forty years in community with nature and without need of the laws made necessary by the civilization of Templeton.

It would be easy to conclude that Cooper sacrifices Natty Bumppo for the greater good of society: As de Tocqueville states, “Democratic laws generally tend to promote the welfare of the greatest possible number [ . . . ]” (*Democracy in America* 1: 237). Cooper as well speaks to individual freedom as acceptable only as that freedom does not trespass on the rights of others. “Individuality is the aim of political liberty. By leaving to the citizen as much freedom of action and of being, as comports with order and the rights of others, the institutions render him truly a freeman” (*American Democrat* 180): It is equally plausible, however, that Cooper uses the law’s abuse of Natty to illustrate the inherent dangers of democratic law. He states:

The habit of seeing the publick rule, is gradually accustoming the American mind to an interference with private rights that is slowly undermining the individuality of the national character. There is getting to be so much publick right, that private right is overshadowed and lost. A danger exists that the ends of liberty will be forgotten altogether in the means. (*American Democrat* 180)

Coupled with his warnings to not lose sight of the individual in a public democracy, Cooper also uses the trial to illustrate how the misuse and abuse of the law can limit the very freedoms it was fashioned to protect. Adams states, “Cooper indicates an awareness that if the integrity of human identity often needs to be protected from the law’s abstractions, the law’s moral authority similarly needs to be preserved from the manipulations of selfishness and opportunism” (58). Certainly Natty would not have

been censured as a citizen had not Dickon and Hiram Doolittle manipulated the Judge into pursuing the matter of the deer Natty, shot out of season.

In addition to the original abuse of the law, Cooper introduces specific dangers of demagoguery through the person of Richard Jones. Cooper includes this telling scene towards the end of the novel:

The public attention became much alive to the events of the last few days; and just at this crisis, the convicted counterfeiters took the hint from Natty, and, on the night succeeding the fire, found means to cut through their log prison also, and to escape unpunished. When this news began to circulate through the village, blended with the fate of Jotham, and the exaggerated and tortured reports of the events on the hill, the popular opinion was freely expressed as to the propriety of seizing such of the fugitives as remained within reach. Men talked of the cave as a secret receptacle of guilt; and as the rumor of ores and metals found its way into the confused medley of conjectures, counterfeiting and everything else that was wicked and dangerous to the peace of society suggested themselves to the busy fancies of the populace.

While the public mind was in this feverish state, it was hinted that the wood had been set on fire by Edwards and the Leatherstocking and that, consequently, they alone were responsible for the damages. This opinion soon gained ground, being most circulated by those who,

by their own heedlessness, had caused the evil; and there was one irresistible burst of the common sentiment that an attempt should be made to punish the offenders. Richard was by no means deaf to this appeal, and by noon he set about in earnest to see the laws executed. (*Pioneers* 405-06)

This passage includes four elements of demagoguery: The publishing, albeit verbally, of misinformation including that Edwards and Natty were responsible for setting the woods on fire; undercurrents of capitalist greed with thoughts of silver mines and the collection of “damages” from Natty and Edwards; the exploitation of the people’s emotions; and the use of the law’s authority which Richard pretends is his own. Richard uses these elements in order to further persecute Natty and to possibly gain his personal desire of the exposition of the supposed silver. Cooper would later write in *The American Democrat* about such politicians as Richard, “The demagogue always puts the people before the constitution and its laws, in the face of the obvious truth that the people have placed the constitution and the laws before themselves. [. . .] [F]or while loudest in proclaiming his devotion to the majority, [the demagogue] is, in truth, opposing the will of the entire people, in order to effect his purposes with a part” (98). For Cooper, there is no worse crime than to subvert the law in order to gain personal advancement. He deals at length with it in later writings, and by the time he writes *The Crater* he feels demagoguery can only be defeated by willing submission to higher, moral laws, similar to Natty’s submission to the laws of nature.

Cooper subtitled *The Pioneers* 'A Descriptive Tale,' leading many to believe he was describing Cooperstown, when in fact he was describing both America and the potential problems he saw with the democratic process. As Brook Thomas points out, Cooper, "raised doubts about the authority of the guardian class and its judiciary to rule. While Judge Temple claims that his laws were impartial, Cooper showed that they could be manipulated to help some more than others" (94). Cooper uses the issues of authority, conservation, and capitalism introduced in *The Pioneers* to show how the law is both necessary and yet potentially harmful to the greater society. In the novel, Cooper illustrates how the law is necessary in order to protect the freedoms of both the individuals in Templeton, as well as the freedom and resources of following generations. Conversely, he also illustrates how greed and demagoguery can contribute to an imbalance of power and a restriction of freedom for certain individuals. And while Cooper does not offer any concrete answers to this potential harm the misuse of the law could cause for America, he has as he has stated, described the problem in a clear and logical manner. Cooper in fact revisits this problem continually in both his fiction and non-fiction alike, and by the time he writes *The Crater*, he is ready to offer some concrete actions for America to take in order to remain a cohesive and truly free society.

## Chapter Three

### Redefining Unity in *The Last of the Mohicans*

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper turns his attention slightly away from the land and the law in order to focus more keenly on issues of voice and power. This is not to say that Cooper does not discuss land ownership, because he does. Rather, it is to say that Cooper's discussion of the land in *Mohicans*, rather than focused on the intricacies of the law and its possible abuses as in *Pioneers*, is tied more directly to issues of voice and political power. Susan Kalter states that in *Mohicans*, "Cooper sets up linguistic rules of engagement, so to speak, in order to express mental and political power" (par. 8). Cooper's focus in *Mohicans* is to show how that linguistic power translates into a sort of public discourse in which America is made stronger through racial and cultural inclusion. Cooper accomplishes this first by carefully establishing the separate and unique nature of each of the races, and then by exploring the new possibilities created as they clash and merge throughout the novel. Granville Ganter argues that while both the whites and the Indians in *Mohicans* continually profess to be purely white and purely Indian, they do so while absorbing and integrating the other's culture. "Cooper [. . .] portrays these ironies throughout *Mohicans*, laying bare the paradoxes of separatist political belief and attempting nonetheless to demonstrate the creation of social identity through political rhetoric" (47).

Cooper uses the opening paragraphs of the novel not only to set the action of the novel, but also to frame his political and social thoughts regarding America's future as a racially integrated nation:

Perhaps no district throughout the wide extent of the intermediate frontiers can furnish a livelier picture of the cruelty and fierceness of the savage warfare of those periods than the country that lies between the head waters of the Hudson and the adjacent lakes.

The facilities which nature had there offered to the march of the combatants were too obvious to be neglected. The lengthened sheet of the Champlain stretched from the frontiers of Canada, deep within the borders of the neighboring province of New York, forming a natural passage across half the distance that the French were compelled to master in order to strike their enemies. Near its southern termination, it received the contributions of another lake, whose waters were so limpid as to have been exclusively selected by the Jesuit missionaries to perform the typical purification of baptism, and to obtain for it the title of lake 'du Saint Sacrement.' The less zealous English thought they conferred a sufficient honor on its unsullied fountains, when they bestowed the name of their reigning prince, the second of the house of Hanover. The two united to rob the untutored possessors of its wooded scenery of their native right to perpetuate its original appellation of "Horican." (*Mohicans* 1-2)

True to form, Cooper makes use of these simple statements of setting to introduce the reader to the political and social overtones of the struggle for possession of the land. Cooper notes the three names Lake George was known by: du Sacrement, Horican and finally Lake George. Seymour Schwartz discusses the historical context of the name changes, noting that Major William Johnson changed the name of the lake. Johnson, “proceeded to the southern shore of Lac Saint Sacrement, to which Johnson assigned the name Lake George, ‘not only to honor his Majesty but to ascertain his undoubted dominion here’” (60). It is clear that the naming of the lake is directly tied to its possession. Cooper reinforces the importance of the authority to bestow a name later in the novel when Hawkeye does not answer to his name when Tammenund is conducting his Indian trial of the captives. Hawkeye explains, “I do not admit the right of the Mingos to bestow a name on one whose friends have been mindful of his gifts [ . . . ] I am the man [ . . . ] whom the Iroquois have presumed to style the ‘Long Rifle,’ without any warranty from him who is most concerned in the matter” (*Mohicans* 314). While Hawkeye is admittedly trying to cover a deception with an honorable explanation to Tammenund, he makes a point which Cooper brings up time and again regarding the right to a voice and its direct connection to the possession of the land. For Cooper, the possession of the land equals the right to be heard, the right to make the laws, and in essence, the right to create and influence the society in which one lives.

In addition to the issues of land ownership and voice, Cooper also introduces in these paragraphs the novel’s underlying theme of the possibility of unity in

addressing America's struggle to become an integrated nation. Cooper refers to the lake as a "holy lake" and makes mention of the origin of its French name from its suitability for the Jesuit's baptisms. Not two paragraphs later, Cooper superimposes the image of the bloody warfare played out on the banks of this "holy lake." "It became, emphatically; the bloody arena, in which most of the battles for the mastery of the colonies were contested" (2). Later, Cooper depicts the slaughter of Munro's men as a sort of baptism of blood, initiating the whites to the savagery of Indian warfare. In mixing the images of the bloody baptism and the efforts of the Jesuit missionaries, Cooper introduces a long series of dyadic forces which serve the purpose of questioning the possibility of whether these forces can coexist. While Cooper clearly illustrates this unity through the friendship of Natty Bumppo and Chingachgok, he ironically uses secondary characters like David Gamut and Cora Munro to further his argument that disparate races can and should live together harmoniously in America. For Cooper, the challenge in writing *The Last of the Mohicans* is to speak to America's future possibilities through a discussion of its past. Cooper must balance the fixed outcome of history in choosing the French and Indian War as the setting, but by creating fictional characters he is able to transcend history in order to reexamine issues of land ownership, race relations and equality of voice, thus speaking directly to the possibilities and hopes he holds for America's future.

A large part of Cooper's attention in *Mohicans* is focused on the land itself and the war for its possession. From the outset, Cooper tells us this war is one, "which England and France [. . .] waged for the possession of a country that neither

was destined to retain” (*Mohicans* 3). This setting is not at all surprising to John P. McWilliams who states, “All of Cooper’s American fictions are laid in a time of social change. Almost without exception, the social change assumes one of two forms: a revolution of government, or a shift in ownership of the land” (6-7). In *Mohicans*, of course, we have a battle for the land as well as a moral battle of conscience concerning a land stripped from the Indians. In fact, when we first meet Hawkeye and Chingachgook, they are speaking of this very issue. Hawkeye actually challenges the notion that the Indians are the native inhabitants of the land saying, “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!” (22).

By using the battle for the land as setting, Cooper creates what McWilliams calls a type of neutral ground which takes shape as, “a frontier . . . unfolded before the reader at precisely the moment when man has invaded his environs but not possessed them, settled the land, but not yet brought it to a stable order” (8). He further notes that this neutral ground, “is deliberately made to stand for the boundless promise of the entire land” (9). By introducing the moral concerns regarding the possession of this “boundless promise,” Cooper shows the active role the possession of the land has taken in shaping the conscience of the nation. W.M. Verhoeven states, “Cooper uses the metaphor of the neutral ground as an *active*, creative instrument – that is, the neutral ground is not so much morally and ideologically

neutral, as morally and ideologically *neutralizing*" (73). He goes on to explain that, "Cooper's neutral ground [. . .] is therefore essentially a *reality gap*, a carefully constructed void that has subsequently been filled by myth [. . .]" (73). And the purpose of this myth is, "not so much to challenge the process of historical formation as to propose alternative reality concepts" (74). In this way, Cooper can use the battlefield as a way of impregnating the closed, fixed history of the French and Indian War with the possibility of an open-ended future for America.

And while *Mohicans* is infused with myth, it is at the same time a history of the evolution of America. Thomas Bender characterizes the setting as the frontier stage, the first and most volatile of his three stages every new country must pass through (291). For Bender, a new country must find a way past the frontier stage and the more capitalistic stage until finally enjoying stability gained from, "disinterested social leadership" provided by an elite that when established would, "provide a framework that would minimize the ill effects of man's natural limitations" (291-92). Whether or not America would reach this state, or whether or not Cooper actually believed the final and most stable stage in the nation's history should be ruled by an "elite" is more in keeping with the direction Cooper takes in *The Crater* and will be further explored in that discussion. It is clear that Cooper uses this frontier setting in *Mohicans* and that he felt the clear ownership of the land would prove a much needed stabilizing factor in America's growth.

In fact, Cooper would later write in *The American Democrat* that property ownership was the key to settling America. "As property is the base of all

civilization, its existence and security are indispensable to social improvement. Were it possible to have a community of property, it would soon be found that no one would toil, but that men would be disposed to be satisfied with barely enough for the supply of their physical wants, since none would exert themselves to obtain advantages solely for the use of others” (133). Cooper further states, “It follows, that all which society enjoys beyond the mere supply of its first necessities, is dependent on their rights of property” (134). In these comments Cooper not only illustrates his belief that personal property ownership improves and stabilizes a country, but also how he feels communal societies are inherently flawed. For Cooper, the communal ownership of land produces and enables a chaotic, unproductive society which exists in the moment without thought toward the betterment of the land or the betterment of the society at large. In *The American Democrat* he states, “[S]ufficiently protected against the designs and rapacity of the dishonest, property is an instrument of working most of the good that society enjoys. It elevates a national character, by affording the means of cultivating knowledge and the tastes; it introduces all above barbarism into society; and it encourages and sustains laudable and useful efforts in individuals” (137-38).

For Cooper then, the issue of land ownership is two-fold. On the one hand, it is a rejection of the utopian, communal lifestyle of the Indians as a flawed system and an endorsement of the white system of personal property as a vehicle for the stabilization of the nation. In this sense, the stabilizing nature of land ownership is a sort of justification for America’s troubled history in obtaining the land. On the other

hand, Cooper's discussion of the war for the land serves to link the past and the future. Cooper creates the neutral and neutralizing ground in order to write the possibilities of the future onto the national consciousness. Richard Hancuff puts it this way, "[I]n *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper was creating a continuity between his novels, a thread that would eventually stretch through a significant span of early American history, from 1740 to 1804 [ . . . ] [that would] reveal an interface between known and unknown, across cultures, that transports its reader [ . . . ] to the site of cultural difference where a nation creates identity" (56).

This linking of past and future agrees with Henning Goldbaek's reading of the text. He notes, "Cooper uses the main characters to discuss the past and the future" (31). And further elaborates, "Maybe the friendship between Hawkeye and Chingachgook is fragile, not to say an illusion, compared to what really happened in history, but Cooper does not describe a future of unity as if it were already there, he asks questions of history, he points out different problems of modernity, power policy, civilization, barbarism, friendship, and makes it possible for the reader to take part in a dialogue about modernity" (31). Part of that dialogue in the 1820s would certainly include the unease of Cooper's readers regarding their rights to the land wrested from Indian control. Cooper himself hints at this unease later in *The American Democrat*, defending the injustice to the Indians. "Civilization has established various, and in some cases, arbitrary and unjust distinctions, as pertaining to the rights of property. These are abuses, the tendency of man being to convert into curses things that Providence designed to prove benefits. Still, most of the ordinances

of civilized society, that are connected with this interest, are founded in reason, and ought to be rigidly maintained” (135). Cooper seems both to acknowledge the abuse and yet justify the possession of the land as best for society. In *The Pioneers*, Cooper wrote almost exclusively about property ownership and the effects the law would have on the frontier and its inhabitants. And although Hawkeye/Natty Bumppo was eventually forced out of this more civilized society, Cooper seems to argue that these civilizing laws are in the best interest of the nation.

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, however, Cooper concerns himself more with trying to balance the inevitability of the land transfer which is fixed in history, with his vision of a harmonious existence between the races which he believes is within the realm of possibility. For Cooper in 1826, America was in the middle of dealing with the Indians. And while the Indian Removal Act was still four years off when Cooper wrote *Mohicans*, many Indians had already been removed to reservations during the Jefferson administration. Jackson as well was under great pressure from whites to finish Jefferson’s removal of the natives (Faragher 438). Many critics, such as Jane Tompkins, argue that Cooper was supportive of this effort to separate the races; however, there is evidence to the contrary. George Dekker, for example, calls Cooper, “the greatest advocate the American Indians ever had” (66), and later states, “[W]e have to recognize that in *The Last of the Mohicans* – and for the first time in American literature – the close friendship between men of different races becomes a matter of central importance” (67).

In fact, Cooper uses the friendship of Natty and Chingachgook to both set the tone of coexistence in *Mohicans* as well as to accustom the nation to the idea of strength created in this union. Cooper's exploration of this friendship is unique both in the level of tolerance and respect each shows for the other's culture, as well as in the unbeatable strength their union created. Very early in the novel, Natty and Chingachgook are speaking of each race's rights to the land, and Natty immediately admits that while he is white, he does not agree with all the ways of his people:

I am not a prejudiced man, nor one who vaunts himself on his natural privileges, though the worst enemy I have on earth, and he is an Iroquois, daren't deny that I am genuine white [ . . . ] and I am willing to own that my people have many ways of which, as an honest man, I can't approve. (*Mohicans* 23)

Natty continues his speech, and allows that, "every story has its two sides" (*Mohicans* 23), empowering Chingachgook by giving him the space to tell his story and argument for the right to the land. Cooper also incorporates into the relationship between Natty and his Indian companions tolerance for each other's ways. When Chingachgook kills and scalps a French guard that they had already deceived through Duncan's ability to speak French, Natty states, "'Twould have been a cruel and an unhuman act for a whiteskin; but 'tis the gift and natur' of an Indian, and I suppose it should not be denied" (*Mohicans* 140).

Beyond the tolerance and respect, it is quite clear that Natty and the Indians form a sort of unbeatable union, with Natty's skills with the rifle and his ability to

speak and understand both the whites and Indians, combined with Chingachgook and Uncas's knowledge of the forest and their respected lineage. Cooper uses this triumvirate to subtly illustrate the possibility of strength gained in a merging of cultures. In fact, Cooper's unique vision of unity for America is illustrated in *Mohicans* through the respect and acceptance of contradictory elements in society as well as through the idea that through their differences, the merged races could actually make the nation stronger. And while these principles are illustrated in the friendship of Natty and Chingachgook, Cooper is clear that Natty is, as Judge Temple proclaims in *Pioneers*, an unusual character. Lest we think that Cooper believes this relationship works only for Natty, he incorporates and further defines these principles of strength in unity through many of his secondary characters.

Certainly Jane Tompkins correctly identifies Cooper's concern with racial mixing as a key question in *Mohicans*. "How and whether it is possible for brethren to dwell together in unity are the questions which the novel is perpetually asking through the juxtaposition of characters whose function is to typify the degrees and divisions of social life" (35). But while Tompkins' identification of the question is accurate, her conclusions are somewhat flawed. She states that for Cooper, "[T]he ideal form of human society consists neither in obliteration of all distinctions nor in the jarring of savage races, but rather in a proper respect for the 'natural' divisions which separate tribe from tribe and nation from nation" (39). And she further states that *Mohicans* shows, "the stability and integrity of a social order depend upon maintaining intact traditional categories of sameness and difference *within* that order,

and on preserving the system as a whole from the disruptive influence of an alien culture” (40).

While Tomkins’ arguments are cohesive and persuasive, she overlooks some of the clues Cooper leaves in presenting and explaining his key question of unity using his secondary characters. It is in fact David Gamut who actually introduces this pivotal theme to the reader. It is Gamut’s song, which he sings for the travelers, which states:

How good it is, O see,  
 And how it pleaseth well,  
 Together, e’en in unity,  
 For brethren so to dwell.  
 It’s like the choice ointment,  
 From the head to the beard did go:  
 Down Aaron’s beard, that downward went,  
 His garment’s skirts unto. (*Mohicans* 17-18)

And while Gamut is a secondary and relatively marginal character, Cooper elevates him by using him as the mouthpiece for his vision regarding race relations. Gamut’s presence in the novel and his elevation of stature by Cooper destroys neat and easy conclusions of separateness, and indicates that his character must be addressed before Cooper’s intentions can be understood.

Forrest Robinson states, “David Gamut’s surname points with almost comical directness to the narrow singularity of his vocational choice, but it glances even more

ironically to the utter lack of scale in his clumsy, ill-sorted outward demeanor.

‘Gamut’ thus announces a contradiction” (13). Gamut’s name does point to contradiction, but not necessarily for the reasons Robinson points out. *Gamut* means anything from “the lowest note of the medieval scale” to “the complete medieval scale” to “the entire series of recognized notes in modern music” to, finally “the entire range or extent” (Neufeldt 554). In this standard definition, Gamut’s name goes from including a very small select portion of a particular musical scale to encompassing a full range of anything. Perhaps in this contradiction Cooper wishes his reader to realize the full extent of Gamut’s character. We first see his outward appearance, his odd, clownish appearance that leads us to put him off as an extra in an already full cast of characters. We are also tempted to view him as the “lowest note” in the cast as Heyward and Hawkeye ridicule him, and the Indians write him off as simply insane. Yet, Cooper has thrown us a curve ball in having this low note deliver the import of the entire novel with his song of brothers dwelling together in unity. This warrants a second look at David Gamut’s character and his message.

When we first meet Gamut, we find a man who is unique, one who stands apart from the crush of humanity. “There was one man, however, who, by his countenance and actions, formed a marked exception to those who composed the latter class of spectators, being neither idle, nor seemingly very ignorant” (6). Following this Cooper gives us a full description of Gamut which seems to encompass a full range of colors, sizes and shapes existing together in one man:

The person of this individual was to the last degree ungainly, without being in any particular manner deformed. He had all the bones and joints of other men, without any of their proportions. Erect, his stature surpassed that of his fellows; seated he appeared reduced within the ordinary limits of the race. The same contrariety in his members seemed to exist throughout the whole man. (*Mohicans* 6-7)

Cooper's description of Gamut provides us with our first inkling that unity could include not just sameness and separateness as Tompkins states, but unity could include divergent forces knit together to form a unique version of humanity. Not only does David Gamut physically represent the ability of opposing forces to coexist, but verbally he shows his independent and unique character by speaking his views without thought of repercussion or disapproval. Gamut thrusts himself into the center of things and articulates his ideas. "While the common herd stood aloof, in deference to the quarters of Webb, the figure we have described stalked into the centre of the domestics, freely expressing his censures or commendations on the merits of the horses, as by chance they displeased or satisfied him" (7).

Critics such as David Seed dismiss Gamut, saying he becomes "more and more irrelevant as the adventures of the novel unfold" (Seed 219). Seed also calls Gamut "a brief attempt at humour which inevitably had to be abandoned once the novel got under way" (220). However, this popular dismissal of Gamut must be cast aside given the importance Cooper himself has placed on Gamut by not only making him the mouthpiece of the question of unity, but also making him the answer. In

Cooper's opening description of Gamut, it is important to note that not only is Gamut a man who is a living contradiction with "contrariness in his members" and attire that "only served to render his awkwardness more conspicuous" (7), but he is also a man who stands apart from others both by his appearance and by his integrity, speaking his thoughts without heed to the crowd's opinions. Thus Gamut conceivably could be a model for an entirely new way of thinking and existing in American society.

Certainly, an argument can be made that Gamut is an integral character in the novel. Wayne Franklin lifts Gamut to the status of Hawkeye's foil, "This ethical contrast is especially important at the start, where Heyward and Gamut jointly serve as Natty's foils" (223). This would echo Martin's idea of the triangular nature of the protagonists in *Mohicans*, Uncas, Heyward and Hawkeye (226); however, instead of the three characters, Gamut would step alongside the others as primary heroes of the novel. But given the story is one of action and danger, we immediately have a disparity of power. Hawkeye's symbol of power is his rifle and his knowledge of the forest and the Indians, while both Uncas and Heyward are defined by their warrior and soldier statuses. Gamut simply has his pitch pipe which seems to point toward his weakness and ineffectualness as a hero. But although Hawkeye casts aspersions on the flogging pipe, Gamut's pitch pipe is actually a symbol of his power, for it is through Gamut's singing hymns to God that he is able to influence the other characters in the novel. At a critical point in the action of the novel as the group is fleeing from Magua's band of men, David sings a hymn which held power over not just the women, but over Chingachgook, Uncas and Hawkeye. "The Indians riveted

their eyes on the rocks, and listened with an attention that seemed to turn them into stone. But the scout, who had placed his chin in his hand, with an expression of cold indifference, gradually suffered his rigid features to relax, until, as verse succeeded verse, he felt his iron nature subdued” (54). And in fact by the end of Gamut’s hymn, Hawkeye is truly weeping. Philbrick attributes these tears to, “the power of Gamut’s art [which] has the capacity to encompass the diverse elements of the scene – the enthusiastic young women, the stoic Indians, the scornful scout, and even the sounds and configuration of the natural setting – and to order that diversity in a harmonious whole” (“Sounds of Discord” 37).

It is in fact Gamut’s weakness that lends him strength. “The weakest, the victim, becomes the moral winner, spiritually superior to his conqueror” (Cro 86). Cro is speaking of the notion of the noble savage, but this can easily be applied to Gamut’s situation as the weakest member (perhaps excluding Alice) of the team of characters trying to survive the wilderness and the savages. He is least able to fight, yet most willing to follow a higher cause even if to his death; in other words, Gamut is true to his moral obligations and the values he has placed upon himself. He stays with the women when they are captured by Magua because he has promised Heyward he would, and he sings only hymns because he has promised himself and God he would do so. House points out that this integrity is exactly what the nation needed at this point in time. “Again we must remember that the nation’s hopes were, for such men as Webster, founded on the total strength of a great number of strong individuals rather than on sheer numbers of men willing to place their undistinguished selves at

the service of the republic” (287). Although the imagery of the tooting pipe in the wilderness may seem odd, Gamut exhibits an integrity of purpose and character throughout the novel that marks him as an individual. Cooper contrasts Gamut’s individuality which furnishes him with power over the other characters in the novel with the Royal American Army’s ineffectual method of fighting, sending in wave after wave of automatons that the savages overcame with the ingenuity suited to the wilderness setting of the war. Apparently Gamut’s individualism and singularity of purpose is exactly what the nation needed in Cooper’s view.

Gamut’s pitch pipe is also a symbol of religion. Gamut is a man *with* a cross, a man who believes and has faith in God. This seems directly opposed to the symbolism of Hawkeye who is forever saying he is a man without a cross. It is conceivable that though Hawkeye primarily means he is a man without a mix of blood, this could also refer to his lack of faith. “He is [. . .] as far removed from the cross of Christianity as he is from the cross of racial mixture” (Philbrick, “Sounds of Discord” 39-40). As a foil to Hawkeye it is important to note that Gamut has a cross of religion, and thus represents the irony of a man with a cross bearing the message that unity can come from compromise, crossing, and accepting one’s brothers.

In discussing religion, it is important to return to Hawkeye and Gamut’s discussion of predestination, doctrine and the nature of knowledge. Although they could not come to consensus, Gamut does provide a way for Cooper to unite the two worldviews. “The instant David discovered that he battled with a disputant who imbibed his faith from the lights of nature, eschewing all subtleties of doctrine, he

willingly abandoned a controversy from which he believed neither profit nor credit was to be derived” (118). In this single act, David Gamut sums up Cooper’s vision of tolerance for those who are different than ourselves and with whom we are to live together. In fact Cooper, immediately after this exchange, calls Gamut “in truth, a minstrel of the western continent [. . .] after the spirit of his own age and country” (118). This does not sound like the language of dismissal as a “non-composer” but rather the validation of Gamut as a force to be reckoned with. In this single episode we are forced to deal with David Gamut as an authoritative voice in answer to the question of unity.

It is interesting to note that although Cooper implies that Hawkeye and Gamut will never agree with each other or change their opinions, there is for each of them a point in the novel in which they do compromise and affirm the other’s beliefs. Ironically, Gamut, by the end of the novel decides to join in the fight against the Indians, stating for Cora’s sake he would “gladly strike a blow” (348). When Hawkeye reminds Gamut they “come to fight, and not to musickate” (349), Gamut readily agrees to not make any sound until he hears the rifles fire. Hawkeye also takes a step toward compromise after Gamut agrees to disguise himself as Uncas and possibly die in the process. Hawkeye tells him he will avenge his death if necessary and Gamut asks instead that Hawkeye forgive and pray for those as ones who need enlightenment. Hawkeye responds, “There is principle in that [. . .] different from the law of the woods; and yet it is fair and noble to reflect upon. [. . .] God bless you, friend; I do believe your scent is not greatly wrong, when the matter is duly

considered” (*Mohicans* 290). For all his dislike of what David represents in the novel, Hawkeye eventually comes to respect Gamut’s individuality and thus ends up embracing his message of tolerance and coexistence.

While Cooper finds a way for Hawkeye and Gamut to find a sort of common ground in which they can at least respect each other’s beliefs, many critics feel the death of Cora and Uncas by the end of the novel points to Cooper’s ultimate belief that the races should be separate. Forrest Robinson intimates this confusion stems from Cooper’s, “unconscious need to have it both ways” (17). And while it is true that Cooper kills off the only pair in the novel prepared to truly cross the blood of whites, Indians and blacks, Robinson still states, “[I]t is no great strain on the text to read [*Mohicans*] as an argument *for* racial mixing” (17). Cooper realizes that while ideally the races can and should be able to live together, his world was likely not ready for drastic changes. For Cooper, presenting the possibility of Cora and Uncas’ union without actually joining them is perhaps his way of balancing a very delicate subject.

Having it both ways, as Robinson states, is no easy task, though, and Cooper must seek a balance between radically different nations. Winifred Farrant Bevilacqua points out in discussing Annette Kolodny’s ideas regarding the two modes of being in nature that whites and Indians represent two very different existences. “The whites are committed to limitless growth, devouring the land from shore to shore, while the Indians give themselves over to nature’s maternal caring and live in the natural world in primal harmony (Kolodny 98-101). Given such radical and irreducible diversities

between Indians and the whites, any attempt to mingle the races must lead to rupture of one of these systems” (123). Certainly Cooper recognizes that neither system can retain its wholeness, but he is at least willing to entertain the idea that a union between Cora and Uncas could lead to a compromise, creating a third alternative to an either/or question. Bevilacqua states, “[T]hrough Uncas, Cooper suggests [. . .] not the rebirth of a pure Indian line but the development of a new race and a new sociopolitical order in America. Union between Cora and Uncas would have been an emblem of human unity and cross-racial bonding and a demonstration that the barriers between races are logically, psychologically, and sexually permeable. Together they would have produced an American offspring to whom the idea of racism would have been irrelevant and for whom a multiracial and multicultural society would have seemed perfectly acceptable” (124). Bevilacqua continues, “Cooper hints that the Indian differences might have been considered not just as a negative problem but as [a] field of positive possibilities and that the whole issue of race relations could have been reformulated so as to open it to a differently constituted sphere of sociopolitical options” (124). And for Bevilacqua, even the mere presence of Cora and Uncas in the text represents the possibility for this new unification of the races. “Yet, even if the alternate versions of history proposed by the marginal characters have not led to an equality of heterogeneous perspectives because they were voiced only to be suppressed by the evolution of history, they remain inscribed in the text where their presence creates an overlay of polyphony

which not only confers a somber tone on the major historical interpretation but also challenges its monolithic validity” (124).

Not only does Cora and Uncas’ presence show the possibility for unity, but it also illustrates Cooper’s belief that true political and social liberty comes through each person having a voice in the construction of his or her society. For Cooper the issue is not so much tied to equality which he notes later in *The American Democrat* is not entirely possible, or even in fact desirable (47), but in providing each with an equality of freedom. That freedom, he states, does not exist, “unless the body of the nation possess, in the last resort, the legal power to frame its laws according to its wants” (*American Democrat* 49). In *Mohicans*, framing the law is tied directly to possession of the land and the power to voice its name.

Cooper calls attention to the importance of voice by noting the various languages spoken, pointing out who is able to speak and understand English, French and the various Indian dialects. He directs the reader’s attention to voice related characteristics such as Gamut’s ability to sing verses Natty’s inability to carry a tune (and the Indian’s inability to distinguish between the two); he notes the Indian’s countless meanings to “hugh”, their often uttered one syllable response; and he makes much of the Indian systems of speaking in turn, both with Uncas and Chingachgook as well as in the various Indian councils and trials held throughout the novel. But nowhere is the use of voice more interesting than in the final scenes containing the funeral of Cora and Uncas.

The scene is divided into a sort of verbal dichotomy with the Indians having their say, followed by the whites of the party speaking as well. The scene begins with Taménund admonishing the crowd that, “the face of the Maintou is behind a cloud” (364), and Cooper hints that God Himself was addressing the crowd. “As this simple and yet terrible annunciation stole on the ears of the multitude, a stillness as deep and awful succeeded as if the venerated spirit they worshipped had uttered the words without the aid of human organs” (365). Following Tamenund are the Indian maidens who speak to Cora and Uncas of their after-life journey together, and Cooper tells us, “they sang with united voices the temper of the Mohican’s mind” (366), intimating that not only did the maidens have a voice, but also the dead Uncas through them. After the women are finished, the warriors address Uncas singing and speaking, “their tribute of praise over the *manes* of the deceased chief” (368). Closing out the Indian side of the funeral, Chingachgook sang a melody over Uncas which commanded the attention of the whole crowd. “Though not an eye was turned towards him, or the smallest sign of impatience exhibited, it was apparent, by the manner in which the multitude elevated their heads to listen; that they drank in the sounds with an intenseness of attention, that none but Taménund himself had ever before commanded” (368).

When every Indian was afforded an opportunity to speak, the scene shifts to the voices of the whites, beginning with a sort of sermon by David Gamut. Cooper states, “During the time David was occupied in pouring out the pious feelings of his spirit in this manner, not a sign of surprise, nor a look of impatience, escaped them.

They listened like those who knew the meaning of the strange words, and appeared as if they felt the mingled emotions of sorrow, hope, and resignation, they were intended to convey” (370). And echoing Chingachgook’s song over Uncas, Munro has a final speech in which he instructs Hawkeye to, “Say to these kind and gentle females, that a heartbroken and failing man returns them his thanks. Tell him, that the Being we all worship, under different names, will be mindful of their charity; and that the time shall not be distant when we may assemble around his throne without distinction of sex, or rank, or color” (371).

What is interesting about the funeral scene is that each person, regardless of color or sex, was given a chance to be heard. Granville Ganter refers to *Mohicans* as a way to open discourse between the nations. “Rather than using his characters as mouthpieces for a simple lesson in political affairs, Cooper uses a series of oratorical performances to draw attention to the strategies and methods of democratic pugilism” (47). And he further concludes that, “Cooper’s achievement in *Mohicans* is a record of the mutual influence of these cultures on each other, respecting their differences, but also as attempt to recognize a discourse that they can share” (49). Cooper shows this shared discourse by noting that the Indians have incorporated the story of Cora and Uncas into their oral history:

But the tie which, through their common calamity, had united the feelings of these simple dwellers in the woods with the strangers who had thus transiently visited them, was not so easily broken. Years passed away before the traditionary tale of the white maiden, and of

the young warrior of the Mohicans, ceased to beguile the long nights and tedious marches, or to animate their youthful and brave with a desire for vengeance. (*Mohicans* 372)

Even Hawkeye is affected by this discourse created by the temporary intermingling of the white travelers and the Indians. Throughout the novel he proclaims himself a man without a cross and distances himself from the Indians and their savage ways. He as well declined to translate Munro's final speech to the Indians regarding the uniting of the nations in God's eyes as more than the Indians could comprehend. Yet, in his final speech to Chingachgook, he not only pledges himself to the Indian, but also reaffirms Munro's belief that all the races are God's children:

The gifts of our colors may be different, but God has so placed us to journey in the same path. I have no kin, and I may also say, like you, no people. He was your son, and a redskin by nature; and it may be that your blood was nearer – but if ever I forget the lad who has so often fou't 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.  
(*Mohicans* 373)

Given the continuing friendship of Hawkeye and Chingachgook, and the establishment, at least fictionally, of a dialogue between the nations, *Mohicans* ends on a hopeful note. *Mohicans* ultimately is a novel of possibility. Bergman states, "In

moving from the historical 'narrative of 1757' in the second half of *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper aspires to poetry and asks for a world more tolerant and more humane than he knew his was and suspected ours would be" (125). What is important to Cooper in *Mohicans* is not to illustrate a particular political point or even to assuage all of white guilt over the Indian situation, but simply to illustrate that it is possible for the races to share a discourse. Once each person has a voice and is listened to, then a unity is possible that can make the nation stronger.

## Chapter Four

### Faith as a Political Solution in *The Crater*

In *The Crater*, James Fenimore Cooper follows his practice of using his fiction to expound upon the problems and the possibilities facing American society. But as William Owen states about Cooper's post-European novels, "[I]nstead of exploring issues of the nation's past and future, Cooper was given to lecturing his countrymen [. . .] on the importance of American social values and political principles in the present and the need to know and practice them" (86). *The Crater* addresses certain concerns Cooper had with the system of America's governing body as well as with the economic system of capitalism, and very specifically the people's rights and responsibilities concerning the laws and Constitution which governed the land. And although Cooper was often portrayed by his political opponents as a spouting, bitter critic, he was not alone in his concerns for the state of America in the 1840s. John P. McWilliams, Jr. states, "Both the founding fathers and many of Cooper's contemporaries conceived of the dangers to the republic exactly as Cooper did" (371). Like others Cooper had a very real concern for the state of America's future, especially after returning from Europe to find his home so changed.

Cooper returned to the United States in 1833 after a nearly seven year stay in Europe. According to Robert Emmet Long, "What he saw—a vast new influx of immigration, obsession with materialistic goals, and leveling of standards—convinced him that his country had changed for the worse" (24). And Long later expounds on these changes in America. "A new era of demagoguery had emerged with the influx

of immigrant population and the recent formation of political party machines; the tone of public life was strident, and Whiggish attacks on Andrew Jackson, whom Cooper had extolled in *Notions*, had reached heights of hysteria; moneymaking had supplanted an earlier sense of public responsibility” (101-02).

One purpose of *The Crater* was to give Cooper a vehicle for addressing these problems and the apparent downturn of political affairs in America. Donald Darnell tells us, “There is no question that the European years were important ones for providing Cooper the opportunity to observe vital distinctions between American and European manners and attitudes toward class and status” (8). Beyond simple class issues though, the distance Cooper had from American politics while in Europe and the ensuing years likely provided him with what he felt was a clearer view of the state of the American Union. Dorothy Waples points out that this distance made Cooper almost fearful for America’s future. “Like American travelers who are terrified by some harsh experience of communism in Russia, totalitarianism in Germany, or militarism in Japan, [Cooper] thought of democracy at home with an intensely anxious and cherishing love. [. . .] When he found Europeans considering our republican government a mere experiment, he was overcome with the passion for defense, for advertisement, for exhibition of success” (21-22). Cooper, it seems then, wrote *The Crater* at least in part to warn America of its possible failure if it were not vigilant against certain elements of society such as the rise of demagoguery and mass rule, the dangers of capitalism without restraint, and the possibility of lessening freedoms by manipulating the law for material gain which Cooper felt would weaken

the American system. He also wished to propose a framework for his own version of an ideal which would ultimately strengthen the States and ensure the success of America.

Cooper also faced difficult personal issues when he returned from Europe, not the least of which was a controversy over his claim to a tract of land referred to as Three Mile Point which had been used as a public park in the Coopers' absence. Cooper spent much time in court and in the press establishing and defending his right to retain his property for his private use. Given the half- and untruths told about the lawsuit in newspaper accounts (for which Cooper later won several libel suits) as well as the unpopularity of his position which was seen as aristocratic, Cooper began to lose favor as an author and as a person with the public. Thomas Philbrick notes in the introduction to *The Crater* that this loss of public opinion lessened the impact of *The Crater* on America. "The few who did choose to notice it [*The Crater*] found that the interest of its vigorous and unusual narrative was vitiated by its restatement of the obnoxious social and political views which had long since lost Cooper the favor of the American press and public" (vii). Not only was *The Crater* overlooked when it was published, but also later critics tended to view it as light humor or simply a spoof of utopian writings, and thus dismissed it as not worthy of serious study. *The Crater* though actually speaks to Cooper's serious concerns regarding America's future. Allan M. Axelrad states, "Although *The Crater* was lightly dismissed as satire in the first great study of Cooper's social thought, the latest generation of Cooper scholars has taken notice of the novel and subjected it to extensive scrutiny" (*History and*

*Utopia* 1). But for all its neglect, *The Crater* truly held a message from Cooper to the American republic.

And while many critics read *The Crater* with its cataclysmic ending as Cooper's passing final judgment on America for all its wrongs to him personally and professionally, it can, by a close examination of Cooper's political and religious beliefs, be seen as actually a warning to America with a strong hope for its ability to prove successful. Especially in light of Waples statements of Cooper's desire for America to succeed, the novel could be viewed as a warning to America by a writer who actually has its best interests at heart. In fact, Axelrad has found Cooper's work more as a social commentary on the state of the nation rather than a criticism of it. "The continuing importance of Cooper's legacy to the social historian results from Cooper's perceptiveness of the main currents of social change during an era that witnessed an incredible transformation of the face of the nation. Virtually everything he wrote bore upon his appraisal of the impact of social change upon the national countenance" (*History and Utopia* vii). McWilliams as well agrees that *The Crater* was an attempt to chronicle the affairs of the nation. "*The Monikins* (1835) and *The Crater* (1847) reflect Cooper's attempt to evolve forms of fiction that could treat such national and political problems more directly and forcefully than either the adventure romance or the novel of manners. In both of these works, Cooper turns a seemingly apolitical sea journey into an allegory of the state of the republic" (341). In other words, in *The Crater* we see a new form which allowed Cooper to articulate his

political ideals through his fiction in a direct attempt to influence the political climate in America.

*The Crater* begins with a brief biography of the hero, Mark Woolston, and his eventual career on a merchant ship. Woolston quickly rises through the ranks and becomes a first mate, but through human error and nature's instability, the ship is caught in a storm in which Woolston and his friend Bob Betts alone survive. They find a small inactive volcano crater which they begin to cultivate and live a Robinson Crusoe existence. Eventually, Betts is carried off in a ship leaving Mark alone to witness a huge earthquake which expands *The Crater* to a proper island paradise. Through a series of fortunate instances, Betts returns to the island with Mark's wife and sister, and thus begins the colonization of the crater. After Mark loses control of the immigration to the island, previously barred lawyers, journalists and religious leaders begin to cause dissention among the Craterinos which eventually leads to Mark's overthrow as governor. Mark and his family leave the crater which he finds destroyed by an act of God when he later returns for a visit. Through this literary convention, Cooper is able to create and subsequently show the downfall of this utopian society and is able to illustrate his political and social views regarding the strengths and weaknesses of America in the 1840s.

One of the changes that most worried Cooper on his return to America was the obsession with moneymaking. It is this obsession that Cooper allies most closely with to the problems he later develops in his ideas regarding the flexibility of the law

and the capitalist urge to influence law solely for profit. Cooper begins the discussion by bringing capitalism to the attention to his readers from the very start of his tale:

The commerce of America, in 1793, was already flourishing, and Philadelphia was then much the most important place in the country. Its East India trade, in particular, was very large and growing, and Dr. Woolston knew that fortunes were rapidly made by many engaged in it. After turning the thing well over in his mind, he determined to consult Mark's inclinations, and to make a sailor of him. (*Crater* 11)

In fact, Cooper fills *The Crater* with numerous references to merchants, trading and wealth in general. Mark's fateful trip was a mission to retrieve very valuable sandalwood about which Cooper makes note of the moral questionability of that trade. He mentions Friend Abraham's supplying the ship with trinkets of little value to trade to the uneducated natives the shipmen might come across in order to make a larger margin on the spices and sandalwood. Later in the novel as the colony grows, Cooper further delves into capitalism by having Woolston hire the natives of a neighboring island to work for the colonists in their ships as well as in building their houses and farming their land. And in case anyone might miss Cooper's point, he writes into his story a very profitable whale oil trade that the colonists wholeheartedly engage in, each making profits according to their shrewdness as business men.

Cooper's Governor Woolston even goes so far as to try to keep the colony hidden from the civilized world in order to protect their gains and their corner on the trade of sandalwood in the region. "The reasons were numerous and sufficient for

this wish to remain unknown. In the first place, the policy of retaining the monopoly of a trade that must be enormously profitable, was too obvious to need any arguments to support it. So long as the sandal-wood lasted, so long would it be in the power of the colonists to coin money; while it was certain that competitors would rush in, the moment the existence of this mine of wealth should be known” (*Crater* 296).

Along with the trade issues, Cooper also discusses property ownership through his governor. Woolston has decided that each man should own his own plot of land in order to ensure the success of the colony:

So long as a man toiled for himself and those nearest and dearest to him, society had a security for his doing much, that would be wanting where the proceeds of the entire community were to be shared in common; and on the knowledge of this simple and obvious truth, did our young legislator found his theory of government. (*Crater* 325)

It is clear through Woolston’s ideas that Cooper believed in a system of government which both promoted and encouraged the basic tenets of capitalism, namely the ownership of private property, and the ability of individual advancement through hard work. Cooper, however, veers from the beliefs of his young hero in that he felt the system of capitalism was not so much a “simple and obvious truth,” but a two-edged sword which if not carefully reigned might be the downfall of both the Crater society as well as American society.

Cooper quite clearly gives a warning of the dangers of making capitalism and the attainment of wealth the goal and not simply the means in precipitating the demise of the Craterinos:

Abundance reigned on every side; in addition to the productions of the island, in themselves so ample and generous, commerce had brought its acquisitions, and, as yet, trade occupied the place a wise discrimination would give it. All such interests are excellent as *incidents* in the great scheme of human happiness; but woe betide the people among whom they get to be *principals*! As the man who lives only to accumulate, is certain to have all his nobler and better feelings blunted by the grasping of cupidity, and to lose sight of the great objects of his existence, so do whole communities degenerate into masses of corruption, venality, and cupidity, when they set up the idol of commerce to worship in lieu of the ever-living God. (*Crater* 387)

Cooper was very careful to outline the dangers not only individuals, but society in general would suffer at the hands of capitalism taken to extremes. For Cooper, trade without a higher system of faith or even law to keep that trade in check was a system doomed to fail. In *The American Democrat*, Cooper writes, “Commerce is merely an incident of civilized society, though there is always a strong disposition in commercial communities to treat it as a principal” (166). The danger, Cooper states, in allowing commerce to be the principal object is, “there is a strong disposition in those connected with commerce, to sacrifice all governing rules, to protect the

interests of the day” (*American Democrat* 166). And changing the laws to suit commercial industries lessens the freedom of the other individuals in the community. Given this reasoning, to Cooper, capitalism without restraint of moral or physical laws is actually a threat to liberty.

As mentioned, Cooper was not the only person to find flaws in the American system of government and economy. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Utopian communities and thoughts began to spring up in America. One of the more persistent movements, especially in Upstate New York was Fourierism. Thomas Philbrick states, “[I]t is clear that Fourierism, like so many other important intellectual currents of the day, has more than a passing relevance to the central concerns of [*The Crater*]” (Intro to *Crater* xxiv). And later states that the destruction of Mark Woolston’s society represents, “a community whose history evinces the inability of imperfect man to create any lasting good” (xxiv). Whether Philbrick is correct in his conclusion of Cooper’s message with the destruction of the island will be left for later discussion, but it is clear that Cooper surely felt socialist communal theories were flawed and could not sustain a society.

Carl Guarneri chronicles the rise of Fourierism in America and states, “In the 1830s and 1840s dreamers and dissenters on both sides of the Atlantic, armed with [Charles] Fourier’s theory, rejected liberal capitalism at its takeoff point and championed in its place his ‘New Industrial World’ of justice, harmony, and personal fulfillment” (17). He notes that Batavia native Albert Brisbane studied under Fourier in France and brought back his theories to America and was one of the first to attempt

phalanxes, or communities, as an alternative to the capitalist system. Brisbane spent enormous amounts of energy and time promoting these societies and their thoughts which leaned toward a socialist system. Guarneri states, “Starting out from the perspective of Transcendentalism, American politics, and Christian reform, these writers shared a strain of utopianism – belief in human perfectibility, romantic faith in brotherhood, and confidence that a natural order of society could reconcile intense individual expression with strong communal values – which pushed them toward communitarian socialism” (35).

While John Beecher explains in his article, “Fourierism and Christianity,” that there were strains and phalanxes that tried to convert the Catholics and some that even integrated the two belief systems, Cooper himself never adhered to any of their teachings, both on a religious as well as a political standpoint. Further, Albert Brisbane was able to enlist the services of Horace Greeley, a newspaper editor and well-known adversary of Cooper’s. Thomas Philbrick points out this adversarial relationship in his introduction to *The Crater* (xxii – xxiv), and states *The Crater* was Cooper’s, “counterattack against the rise of socialism, a movement which to him must have seemed to propose the last and fatal extension of the leveling process, the stifling of individuality in a conformity dictated by the tyrannical majority, that had given him increasing concern since his return to America [. . .]” (xx). But Cooper was not against socialism and Fourierism simply because he wished to draw political lines in the sand; in fact, Cooper had very real issues regarding the stifling of individual drive and liberty.

Cooper actually wrote much concerning his disregard for socialist societies as the quickest way to America's dissolution. In *The American Democrat* he states, "Were it possible to have a community of property, it would soon be found that no one would toil, but that men would be disposed to be satisfied with barely enough for the supply of their physical wants, since none would exert themselves to obtain advantages solely for the use of others" (133). Cooper ties individual property ownership directly to individual success and betterment, and thus to the direct success of the nation. It is clear then that he viewed utopian societies such as Fourierism as a direct threat to the basic freedom and individuality which in turn threatened the health of the nation. Cooper used *The Crater* to outline some of these concerns.

Another option Cooper might have considered in his thoughts about America's republic might have been a more aristocratic form of government. In fact Cooper was thought of by many as an aristocrat especially after his European years. Axelrad explains in his article, "Aristocracy forsooth!" that Cooper had been labeled an aristocrat by both biographers and critics alike (8), but goes on to explain that Cooper was labeled this more for his carriage and customs rather than for his political beliefs. Since Americans wished to distance themselves with England, the term aristocrat was often used as a political slur. "Aristocrat was a term of opprobrium used to vilify political or economical enemies. Like most of his fellow countrymen, Cooper detested aristocrats, agreed that aristocratic behavior was unrepublican, and was vehemently opposed to aristocracy" ("Aristocracy forsooth!" 12). Dorothy Waples notes the idea of Cooper as an aristocrat was perpetuated by erroneous

biographies, including Thomas Lounsbury's which was written without the benefit of Cooper's personal papers and letters (1-5).

At issue with the aristocratic form of government would be the political preference given to the wealthy and the landowners. Cooper was in fact very specific regarding his stance on landowner's rights. In *The American Democrat* he writes, "It is the right of the possessor of property to be placed on an equal footing with all his fellow citizens, in every respect. [. . .] In this country, it is the intention of the institutions, that money should neither increase nor lessen political influence" (136). It is clear from this statement that Cooper did not consider himself aristocratic, but was very much a democrat who believed each individual should have an equal voice. John F. Ross illuminates Cooper's position against aristocracies as his desire for individual liberty for all men. "Fostered by the America of his time, his individualism led him to desire that all men should have the right and opportunity to achieve what superiority their innate capabilities permitted" (22).

In reality, it was Cooper's desire and belief in individuality, and respect for that individuality, which caused him so great a concern over capitalism. According to Axelrad, Cooper saw capitalism as the foremost threat of aristocracy to the nation ("Aristocracy forsooth!" 11), and further states, "Fear of aristocracy caused Cooper to worry about increasing commercialism and particularly the spread of monopolistic corporations. [. . .] Under aristocracy the people could be callously exploited, deprived of basic rights, and even reduced to slavery" ("Aristocracy forsooth!" 12). Cooper's fear was that the corporations would become so large and powerful as to

gain political sway and ability to influence and even change laws under the guise of protecting America's economy, which would in turn create an economic aristocracy lessening the rights of individual Americans.

The problem for Cooper, as John McWilliams points out, is that in order to protect against becoming an aristocracy with business owners having unfair sway over policy-making, the Constitution and laws of the United States would have to be strictly adhered to. However, without the ability of the people to change the laws as necessary, there would be no true liberty in America. So Cooper was stuck between desiring a strong, unchangeable constitution and protecting the right of the people to change laws when those laws outlive their usefulness. McWilliams states, "Cooper wish[ed] to present the Constitution and all existing bodies of civil law as static and unchanging, as fixed a permanent defenses against those who would turn public opinion into law. At the same time, however, Cooper's devotion to the American polity [led] him to acknowledge and honor the changeability of law [. . .]" (201).

Cooper illustrates this point in *The Crater* with the ousting of Mark Woolston as governor. When a group of men decided they no longer wished to follow the rules set up in the colony, they used their ability to change the laws in order to allow themselves to vote Woolston out. Cooper hints to his readers that change is inevitably coming with his opening statements of chapter twenty-four:

The colony had now reached a point when its policy must have an eye to its future destinies. If it were intended to push it, like a new settlement, a very different course ought to be pursued from the one

hitherto adopted. But the governor and council entertained more moderate views. (*Crater* 352)

The more moderate views of the governor fell on the side of limiting immigrants in order to preserve both the land and the trade of the island, but the citizens of the crater eventually prevailed and more friends and relatives soon arrived. As Governor Woolston lost control of the immigration issue, lawyers, journalists and various religious leaders joined the colony. The diverse and strongly held views, coupled with the demagogic political actions gave rise to the initial stages of the collapse of the society beginning with Mark's overthrow:

At length, the demagogues thought they had made sufficient progress to spring their mine. The journal came out with a proposal to call a convention, to alter and improve the fundamental law. [. . .] It was a slow, deliberative process, too, one by which men had time to reflect on what they were doing, and so far protected vested rights as to render it certain that no very great revolution could be effected under its shadow. Now, the disaffected aimed at revolution [. . .] and it became necessary to set up some new principle by which they could circumvent the old fundamental law. (*Crater* 439)

This circumvention was accomplished easily by putting, “the balance of the power in the hands of the minority” (*Crater* 439). And through some old fashioned trickery coupled with inaction as only a third of the eligible voters turned out, the rest

believing the proceedings to be illegal, a new law was instated that made the governorship a five year term, effectively making Mark ineligible at the next election.

Although Woolston was saddened and felt the colonists were wrong in creating this new law, Cooper has him retreat and allow his dismissal. If Cooper had Woolston fight the decision, it would show Cooper as not agreeing with the liberty men have to change their society to fit their needs; on the other hand, if Woolston wholeheartedly agreed with their decision then Cooper would be condoning the methods of the demagogue. Cooper provides himself an out with his ending as Mark accepts the judgment of the colonists, yet in the end God or nature destroys them presumably for their behavior.

With Cooper's lack of confidence in the democratic system, and his rejection of socialist and aristocratic models, we are left with questions as to his faith in the future of the American experiment. For many critics of *The Crater*, the answer to Cooper's political beliefs lies in the ending in which the colony, all but a lone tree left to mark its former existence, is demolished. There are many different readings of the end of *The Crater* and many interpretations as to its meaning regarding Cooper's beliefs. Allan Axelrad defines *The Crater* and its ending within the confines of the cyclical nature of history, comparing the existence of the colony to the series of paintings, *The Course of Empire* by artist Thomas Cole. Axelrad concludes, "The plain meaning of both Cole's and Cooper's work is that *real progress* is not possible within profane history, that the nineteenth century was wrong" (*History and Utopia* 4). And while John McWilliams agrees that the eruption of the crater has to do with

the inability of humans to control their society (370), he focuses on the ending as Cooper's relinquishment of the political fight he had engaged in his whole life. McWilliams states, "The fall of Mark Woolston's utopia left Cooper with much to write against but precious little to write for. In 1847 Cooper had finally acknowledged the inability of a republic legally to resist the threats of demagoguery and false public opinion" (375). Both of these readings view the ending as a final judgment, leaving no hope for the path America had chosen. However, neither view fully takes into account Cooper's religious faith which is so important in determining his true vision for America.

Everything Cooper wrote was filtered through his own personal belief system which was strong in Christian thought. Philbrick states, "Only in the last decade or so has there been widespread recognition of the fact that Cooper's social criticism, incisive and important though it is, is but one facet of an inclusive and ultimately religious Weltanschauung, a world view which, in the best of his mature novels, interpenetrates and fuses every element of the work" (Intro to *Crater* viii). In fact, Arvid Schulenberger quotes Howard Mumford Jones as stating Cooper, "was the only American novelist of international stature to take Christianity seriously both as personal motive and as social force" (5). Clearly Cooper's religious beliefs must be taken into account in order to more fully understand the meaning to America of the ending of *The Crater*.

While it is obvious that Cooper was speaking to the political situation of the United States through *The Crater*, it is also important not to overlook that for Cooper,

religious faith was inextricably tied to those political beliefs. Axelrad puts it this way, “[T]he picture that emerges is of a coherent and consistent conservatism – a profound conservatism that issues from a theological evaluation of man’s essential nature, and which extends from the religious sphere to all walks of life” (*History and Utopia* ix). Cooper actually tries to fuse his religious beliefs with his political in order to work out the conflicts he has with the democratic system. For Cooper, morality and submission to God’s laws were ways in which the systems of democracy and capitalism could function properly.

Cooper infuses his novel with spiritual truths and holds these up as the salve the Craterinos need in order to keep their society moving forward smoothly. From the beginning, Cooper has Mark Woolston continually thanking and worshipping God for each little advantage he notices, from the guano in which to cultivate fertile soil to the reappearance of Betts bringing Mark’s wife. Later, as the colony grows, Mark continually notes how worship of God should find a higher place in the hearts of the community members than what sect or denomination they belong to, as well as a higher place than commerce or any other pursuit. Most interesting, though, is how Cooper finds a way to use the laws of God to solve civil law problems. When Mark finds himself battling over truths with the editor of the newspaper, he brings up God’s laws in his argument:

Now, if a majority has a right to rule, in this arbitrary manner, it has a right to set its dogmas above the commandments, and to legalize theft, murder, adultery, and all other sins denounced in the twentieth chapter

of Exodus. [. . .] Constitutions, or the fundamental law, the governor went on to say, were meant to be the expression of those just and general principles which should control human society, and as such should prevail over majorities. (*Crater* 436)

Cooper uses divine law, then, in order to establish that there must be certain immutable laws, such as the moral laws found in the Judeo-Christian tradition, in order to protect against the whims of the majority or even a powerful minority. McWilliams is driving at this point in his essay on *The Crater* and the Constitution when he speaks of Cooper's desire to have a strong constitution while allowing for personal freedom through the ability to change those laws. For Cooper, this system can only work with moral, self-governing individuals who respect and recognize a higher, immutable power.

For Cooper this moral, religious law is the crux of the issue. The republic can only survive if its people agree to submit to laws and powers higher than themselves, and for Cooper this means the laws of God as he understands them in the Christian faith. As well, capitalism only works if there are morals behind it, and its operators agree to limit their liberties within moral, God-given boundaries. At the very end of *The Crater*, Cooper presents Mark Woolston pondering over the demise of his island and its inhabitants. It is important to carefully look at his conclusions:

Of such is the world and its much-coveted advantages. For a time our efforts seem to create, and to adorn, and to perfect, until we forget our origin and destination, substituting self for that divine hand

which alone can unite the elements of worlds as they float in gasses, equally from His mysterious laboratory, and scatter them again into thin air when the works of His hands cease to find favor in His view.

Let those who would substitute the voice of the created for that of the Creator, who shout “the people, the people,” instead of hymning praises of their God, who vainly imagine that the masses are sufficient for all things, remember their insignificance and tremble. They are but mites amid millions of other mites, that the goodness of providence has produced for its own wise ends; their boasted countries, with their vaunted climates and productions, have temporary possessions of but small portions of a globe that floats, a point, in space, following the course pointed out by an invisible finger, and which will one day be suddenly struck out of its orbit, as it was originally put there, by the hand that made it. Let that dread Being, then, be never made to act a second part in human affairs, or the rebellious vanity of our race imagine that either numbers, or capacity, or success, or power in arms, is aught more than a short-lived gift of His beneficence, to be resumed when His purposes are accomplished. (*Crater* 459)

These final two paragraphs frame Cooper’s novel squarely in the origination of human interaction with the divine. One can not escape Cooper’s point that the “unseen” finger might hurl us out of orbit at anytime should we incur the Almighty’s displeasure. But even with such strong language as Cooper seems to threaten

America with, I believe there is just as much cause to believe he is simply warning America and does in fact have a hope for America's continued success. John Hales notes that Cooper, "wants to document the fact that America's slide into demagoguery is so precipitous as to be reversible, and he wants to persuade his readers to change their fatal ways before it really is too late" (144). Hales' idea that Cooper feels America can reverse its course has a lot to do with Cooper's ideas of religion, and specifically with predestination and the possibility of human perfection. Hales notes that, on the one hand, Cooper reference to Cole's *The Course of Empire* would suggest that America is on a predestined course and must fall to the fate of the cycle of history (144). On the other hand, Cooper's specific warning to America, "Let that dread being [. . .] be never made to act a second part in human affairs," suggests that God will act according to how well humans conduct their affairs (Hales 151).

Perhaps some of this apparent contradiction has to do with Cooper's own religious journey in which he never pledged to a specific denomination until just before his death. Cooper's parents were former Quakers but had retained the speech patterns and certainly many principles from their religion. His father did choose the Episcopal church as the principal religion when he established Cooperstown, and as well, Cooper's wife and her family were committed Episcopalians. These two denominations would have fallen on either side of the predestination debate, with the Quakers leaning to the Calvinist proposal that man's future is predestined and determined, while the Episcopalians would have believed in a more open belief in

man's ability to work towards perfection, even if he could not actually attain it here on earth.

In *The Crater*, we see a mini-struggle between the two denominations with Mark Woolston worshipping in the Episcopal tradition while Betts clings to his Quaker upbringing. Interestingly enough, Cooper never shows this to be a dividing point between the two friends as they respect each other's beliefs, even while hoping the other might convert. Woolston continues faithfully to hold his Episcopal beliefs, eventually only allowing an Episcopal priest onto the island. When others immigrate illegally, Woolston only harbors sadness that the ensuing religion debates draw attention away from worshipping God; he never attempts to have the other faiths removed. Cooper himself finally chose the Episcopalian denomination and became a communicant in his final hours. With this more positive outlook on man's opportunity to choose his path, it is certain that Cooper, in *The Crater*, was, "struggling to divide responsibility for events of the last days between human effort and divine will" (Hales 145).

What is clear then is that Cooper has integrated his faith into his study of the political workings of a society. Robert Emmet Long, in speaking of several of Cooper's later novels, notes that they, "reflect Cooper's deepening religious preoccupation, his theme of the need of redemptive purification through a humbling of the self before God's infinite majesty and grace" (27). Philbrick refers to this preoccupation as Cooper's, "microcosmic study of man's relation to God's operation of the universe" (Intro to *Crater* xi). But it is more than just a study to Cooper; for

Cooper, the only way America can survive is to submit itself to God's higher laws in order to avoid the problems of demagoguery and the weakening of the republic by capitalists gone astray.

*The Crater* was Cooper's way of warning America. We can not forget some of the last words in the novel warning that men should not forget "that divine hand which alone can unite the elements of worlds" (*Crater* 459). Cooper saw the contradictory elements of the democracy as the need for a strong constitution and strict laws, while having the ability to change that law to ensure liberty. He also saw the contradictions of capitalism, with its excellent motivation for men to strengthen their positions in the world and thus strengthen their communities, while having a tendency to lead towards a type of economic aristocracy. And just as he saw these challenges to the success of America's republic, he felt that a devotion to God and the requisite morals and self-government that followed would unite America and ensure its future success by mediating these contradictions through the laws of God. In this reading then, Cooper's novel is most certainly, "offered to America as a warning, not a prediction" (Hales 153), and offers the hope that Cooper felt for America and not a condemnation or a finality that some would give it.

## Chapter Five

### Saving the Nation as Civic Duty

For all his “bad press,” James Fenimore Cooper wanted nothing more than to be heard, in essence to have a voice, concerning his perceptions of the political hazards America was facing as it fleshed out the workings of a democratic, free society. And rather than becoming embittered and vengeful as some have stated, Cooper’s writings show his consistent effort at not only attempting to point out problems in American institutions, but also in providing solutions and hope for the possibility of America becoming an even stronger nation which could support an enduring liberty for generations to come. As Cooper states in his conclusion of *The American Democrat*:

Under every system it is more especially the office of the prudent and candid to guard against the evils peculiar to that particular system, than to declaim against the abuses of others. Thus, in a democracy, instead of decrying monarchs and aristocrats, who are impotent, it is wiser to look into the sore spots of the only form of government that can do any practical injury, and to apply the necessary remedies, than to be glorifying ourselves at the expense of charity, common sense, and not unfrequently of truth. (189)

Cooper not only believed it was useless to warn and rail against evils that would hardly befall America, but believed it was his duty to the nation to point out actual dangers that threatened America’s strength and cohesion. For Cooper, to ignore these

problems as a way of uplifting the self-esteem of the nation was not only dishonest, but was also more dangerous than questioning the solidity of the nation. Cooper also believed it his duty to make proposals towards fixing the problems in order to have both a strong nation as well as one in which the liberties of its citizens were carefully protected.

In *The Pioneers*, Cooper writes about the civilizing nature of the law, illustrating both the benefits and dangers of democratic law. Cooper shows in *Pioneers* how the law, while necessary for ensuring the freedoms of all individuals, can when misused, become the source of unequal freedoms and thus a weakness for the nation. He states in *The American Democrat*:

It is a governing principle of nature, that the agency which can produce the most good, when perverted from its proper aim, is most productive of evil. It behoves the well-intentioned, therefore, vigilantly to watch the tendency of even their most highly prized institutions, since that which was established in the interests of the right, may so easily become the agent of wrong. (188)

Given these statements, it is reasonable to assert that Cooper, far from decrying the law or even from disparaging the United States, was in fact “vigilantly watching” as well as warning his fellow citizens against the threat of abuse.

In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper writes about themes of inter-racial unity through tolerance, individuality and voice. He illustrates through the friendship of Hawkeye and Chingachgook, and in his secondary characters how through the

establishment of a public discourse, the races could unite, strengthening the nation. In *Mohicans*, Cooper uses the backdrop of history mixed with the fictional myth to create the possibility and hope for a better future for America.

In *The Crater*, Cooper focuses keenly on the capacity for abuse of a necessarily changeable law. Cooper vividly illustrates in his utopian island, as well as in its destruction, not that he was unhappy or disillusioned with the American experiment, but rather that he saw the flaws in a system that allowed the inequalities of liberty through the misuse of the law. Cooper also saw a hope in religion and morality as a way to keep a system of democratic law while still protecting against immoral and self-centered demagogues and merchants who wished to pervert the system for their own gain. And while the concept of religion as a political stabilizer may sound foreign to a reader in the twenty-first century, in Cooper's time this idea, to a nation not very far removed from its Puritan roots, would not necessarily be out of the ordinary. Reflecting on his time spent with Americans, Alexis de Tocqueville states:

I have sometimes asked Americans whom I chanced to meet in their own country or in Europe whether in their opinion religion contributes to the stability of the State and the maintenance of law and order. They always answered, without a moment's hesitation, that a civilized community, especially one that enjoys the benefits of freedom, cannot exist without religion. In fact, an American sees in religion that surest

guarantee of the stability of the State and the safety of individuals.”

*(Old Regime 153)*

For Cooper, religion was not only a perfectly reasonable solution to the dilemmas he presented in these novels, but also it was an integral part of his worldview and thus figured heavily in his writings. Cooper had exposure to both Quaker and Episcopal doctrine, and before his death he became an Episcopal communicant. And while it is clear that Cooper’s ideas of faith related directly to these Judeo-Christian traditions, he remained a strong opponent of sectarianism. He states:

In America the taint of sectarianism lies broad upon the land. Not content with acknowledging the supremacy of the Deity, and with erecting temples in his honor, where all can bow down with reverence, the pride and vanity of human reason enter into and pollute our worship, and the houses that should be of God and for God, alone, where he is to be honored with submissive faith, are too often merely schools of metaphysical and useless distinctions. *(American Democrat 186)*

Both in religion as well as politics, Cooper was a proponent of tolerance, respect and the acceptance of the individual, and through his fiction he attempted to illustrate both the dangers of divisiveness as well as the potential for strength through unity.

Also illustrated in Cooper’s faith and equally important for Cooper is humility. Especially in *The Crater*, Cooper shows that humility is important in order

that God not “act a second part” in the course of man’s history. Coupled with a strong moral code, that humility could, Cooper felt, curb the propensity for individuals to act selfishly, especially in regards to the weaknesses he has pointed out with democratic law. As Philip Gould explains, “[T]he experience of history sadly demonstrated that all republics inevitably declined because citizens eventually succumbed to [. . .] the passionate desires of greed and ambition that sacrificed the public good on the altar of self-interest” (24-25). For Cooper, the only logical way to remedy that tendency towards selfish manipulation of the law, and thus help prove the American experiment successful, was through the stabilizing force of faith, including tolerance, humility and morality.

In this light, it is reasonable to understand Cooper’s use of his fiction, not as a judgment on America, but rather as a way in which he could fulfill his sense of duty to the republic. For Cooper his writing was the vehicle in which he felt he could best serve his country, pointing out the real dangers of divisiveness, the loss of individual freedom, as well as the possible structural corruption resulting from systematic abuses of the law. Although Cooper was not always received well, he truly did have America’s best interests at heart. Through the consistency of themes and the hopeful tones of *The Pioneers*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *The Crater*, we can better see the vision Cooper had of hope for America’s future as a unified nation whose citizens protected their freedom by the integration of moral and civil law.

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