

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

THE AMERICAN FRONTIER: FROM COOPER TO HOLLYWOOD

por

CELIA FERRAREZI BECKEDORFF

Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento parcial dos requisitos para obtenção do Grau de MESTRE EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS

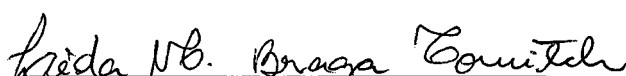
Fevereiro, 2001.


Esta Dissertação de Celia Ferrarezi Beckedorff, intitulada *The American Frontier: From Cooper to Hollywood*, foi julgada, adequada e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente, da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, para fins de obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

Área de Concentração: Inglês e Literatura Correspondente

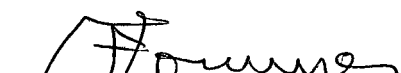
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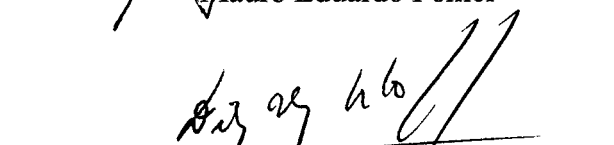

Leda Maria Braga Tomitch
Coordenadora


Anelise Reich Corseuil
Orientadora

BANCA EXAMINADORA:


Anelise Reich Corseuil


Mauro Eduardo Pomer


Dilvo Ristoff

Florianópolis, 20 de Fevereiro de 2001.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Happiness is the only thing worthwhile in life. The time to be happy is now. The place to be happy is here. The way to be happy is to make yourself happy. And today I am really happy, because my dream which started twenty years ago came true.

And I would like to extend my gratitude to those who helped me to fulfill this dream:

My father and brother, all my family especially my husband Irzo, my sons Felipe and Frederico, for their understanding, cooperation and continuing support and enthusiasm since the beginning of my dissertation. I would like to dedicate this work to my mother (In memoriam) who, one day, dreamt of me, foreseeing the conclusion of my work.

All my friends, who, in one way or another, have provided me with the necessary strength to continue my task, to Alexandre Cohn da Silveira and Sandra Schatz my ex-students and good friends, who have shared with me the pleasure of studying, to Adriana and Gisele for believing in me and more than anything, I would like to thank my colleague, my friend and partner, Mara Elizabeth Voigt, for her professional and friendly help and a special thanks to my dearest friend Diva Martinelli in my moments of panic.

All the professors from the M.A. Program from UFSC, for their classes and support during the two years of my M.A. course.

Finally, I wish to thank, in special, Dr. Anelise Corseuil for introducing me to film studies, providing me with bibliographic aid, stimulus and encouragement to work even when I faced hard times. For believing in my work and for being my friend and advisor. Her capacity and encouragement have been more than I could have asked for, and more than I deserved. Thank you.

Florianópolis, Fevereiro de 2001

ABSTRACT

THE AMERICAN FRONTIER: FROM COOPER TO HOLLYWOOD

CÉLIA FERRAREZI BECKEDORFF

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

2001

Supervising Professor: Anelise Reich Corseuil

The New York writer James Fenimore Cooper (1789 – 1851) wrote in his thirty years of authorship, twenty-nine long works of fiction and fifteen books, as well as volumes of social comments, naval history and travel description. Cooper reached his artistic peak when he wrote *The Leatherstocking Tales – The Pioneers* (1823) *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841). Of all the novels, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) is the most attractive and has Natty Bumppo as the central figure of the series. His character is presented as a pure white British man who prefers the code of the Indian than the nature of the white settlers. Cooper saw and used Nature not only as an exotic setting of the new land (the frontier), but also as the means through which man's deep feelings could be expressed. Nature, he seems to say, is good; civilization is bad. Men who are close to nature – white or red – are noblemen, but those who represent society are corrupt. The novel is exciting as it shows noble Chingachgook and his nobler son Uncas, exciting chases, pursuits, rescues, violence and the main theme: the destruction of a race in the frontier. Cooper would not have the last word in regard to his novel. He could never predict that his novel would be at least thirteen times, adapted to the screen. This dissertation analyzes the ways in which the myth of the Western frontier was represented in both James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans* and its two filmic adaptations: the 1936 version by George Seitz, and the 1992, by Michael Mann. Before analyzing the filmic

device mise-en-scene to show the ways in which Cooper's theme of the frontier was adapted and reproduced into films, this thesis will advance a review of cultural theories on the social significance of the Western frontier. The research will also present a comparative analysis of settings, characters and the plot of Cooper's novel and the filmic device mise-en-scene. This analysis is necessary in order to show the ways in which Cooper's theme, treatment of the frontier, was adapted, have been reproduced or changed in the 1936 and 1992 filmic versions. As a result, while the 1936 version emphasizes the journey of the sisters, Indians' attack, captures, rescues, death of Uncas and the suicide of Alice, the frontier theme is forgotten and the destruction of a native race by the coming of civilization is never explored at all. In the 1992 version, the story has the same line, but Mann recounts it as close to reality as any modern film could be, respecting the setting and the place – North Carolina Mountains. However, within a modern filmic language, Mann sets new standards when the film comes to a love story between Alice and Uncas and Cora and Hawkeye. As a consequence, the central theme of the novel is directly transformed according to the audience's taste and the cultural background of the period in which both films were presented. As a consequence Hollywood loses the opportunity to show the real history about the American culture and transforms the novel in an romantic adventure.

Number of pages: 72

Number of words: 25.181

RESUMO

O escritor nova-iorquino James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) escreveu em seus trinta anos de carreira artística, vinte nove longos trabalhos de ficção e quinze livros, assim como volumes de comentários sociais, histórias navais e descrições de viagens. Cooper atingiu o seu auge quando escreveu *The Leatherstocking Tales – The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827) *The Pathfinder* (1840) e *The Deerslayer* (1841). De todos os romances, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) é o mais atraente e tem Natty Bumppo, como personagem central de toda a série. Seu personagem é apresentado como o Inglês puro branco que prefere o código do índio do que a natureza dos colonizadores brancos. Cooper viu e usou a Natureza não só como um cenário exótico da nova terra (fronteira), mas também como um meio através do qual o homem pode expressar seu mais profundo sentimento. Natureza, parece dizer, é boa; civilização é ruim. Os homens que estão perto da natureza – branco ou vermelho – são nobres, mas aqueles que representam a sociedade são corruptos. O romance é excitante porque mostra o nobre Chingachgook e seu mais nobre filho Uncas, perseguição, busca, salvamentos, violência e o tema central: a destruição de uma raça na fronteira. Cooper não teria, no entanto, a última palavra em relação a seu romance: seu romance foi adaptado para o cinema por, pelo menos, treze vezes.

Essa dissertação analisa os meios pelos quais o mito da fronteira foi representado tanto no romance quanto nas duas versões de cinema em 1936 por George Seitz e em 1992 por Michael Mann. Antes de estudar “mise-en-scene” para mostrar como o tema da fronteira no romance de Cooper foi adaptado e reproduzidos no cinema, a opinião de três historiadores apresentará uma revisão da teoria cultural do significado social da fronteira Oeste. O próximo foco será na comparação e semelhança entre “setting,” os personagens e o enredo do romance de Cooper e maiores considerações serão dadas a “mise-en-scene” no tratamento da fronteira

nos dois filmes de 1936 e 1992. Como resultado, enquanto a versão de 1946 enfatiza a viagem das irmãs, ataques índios, captura, salvamentos, a morte de Uncas e suicídio de Alice, o tema da fronteira é esquecido e a destruição de uma raça nativa pela vinda de colonizadores nunca é explorada. In 1992, a estória segue a mesma linha, mas Michael Mann a reconta o mais próximo possível da realidade que qualquer filme poderia ser, respeitando o “setting” e o local – Montanhas da Carolina do Norte. No entanto, em uma linguagem moderna, Mann estabelece novos padrões quando o filme se volta para uma estória de amor entre Alice e Uncas e Cora e Hawkeye. Como consequência, o tema central do romance é diretamente transformado de acordo com o gosto da platéia, e o período histórico da época no qual os dois filmes foram apresentados e Hollywood perde a oportunidade de mostrar uma versão mais problematizada da história americana, transformando o romance de Cooper em uma aventura romântica.

Número de páginas: 72

Número de palavras: 25.181

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the myth of the American Western Frontier and how this myth has shaped the American national character. I intend to achieve this by showing how the myth of the Western Frontier was represented in both James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans*, and its filmic adaptations – the 1936 and 1992 versions. Furthermore, I will consider some historical and cultural aspects of the Western frontier (Chapter I) and focus on a comparison of the similarities and difference between the settings, the characters and the plot of Cooper's novel, and its filmic adaptations (Chapter II and III). Major consideration will be given to the filmic device *mise-en-scene* to show the ways in which Cooper's theme, treatment of the frontier, was adapted, reproduced or changed in the 1936 and 1992 film versions.

My central working hypotheses are: (1) the conception of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* as a fictional narrative deeply ingrained in the Nineteenth Century American mythology of the Western frontier; (2) the idea that its filmic versions, loose adaptations of the novel, deeply changed its focus, themes, plot and concerns; (3) the conception of these changes as being related with the taste and culture of the historical moment in which they were produced; and, (4) the argument that *mise-en-scene* helps to explain the differences between them.

Considering these aims and hypotheses, three tasks are in order at this introductory point. First, it is necessary to consider briefly the history of *The Last of the Mohicans* as a narrative that has changed from its first publication to its different filmic adaptations. Second, it is necessary to consider the differences between the novel and the films as narratives and the difficulties to turn the novel into a film. Finally, it is necessary to analyze the filmic

devices – mise-en-scene, settings, props, costumes and make up – which will be crucial for the understanding of the different versions *The Last of The Mohicans*.

The History of the Narrative

The Last of the Mohicans, a novel written by James Fenimore Cooper, was published in 1826. Cooper was an American writer who lived from 1789 to 1851 and who published, in his thirty-years (1820-1851) of authorship, twenty-nine long works of fiction and fifteen books, as well as volumes of social comments, naval history and travel description. He shipped to England in 1806 as a common sailor and later he was commissioned and served three years in the U.S. Navy. According to Peter B. High, in Europe, Cooper became known as “the American Walter Scott”, as he wrote adventure stories filled with historical details¹ (High 33).

He is mainly known for his series of five "Leather-Stocking" novels in which tells the life story of Natty Bumppo. The books are *The Pioneers* (1823), *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841). These books tell the story of a woodsman who learns from boyhood about the Indians' love of nature. The series continues with Bumppo's return to the romantic elements of nature. Writing in the Nineteenth Century, James Fenimore Cooper was the first American novelist to achieve worldwide fame (*Adventures in American Literature* 495-512) and the popularity of his novels at the newly independent United States is and is not a surprising phenomenon. On one hand, it is surprising because the American Puritans – who had developed the only form of literature (Puritan literature which focused on religious subjects) to exist in the colony since they were established - had always considered the novel a “dangerous” form of literature. In the Puritan view, novels put “immoral” ideas into the heads of young people. Nevertheless, in

understanding Cooper's popularity, it should not be neglected that, as written in the nineteenth century, Cooper's novels were aimed at male readers because the subject would be shocking for female readers (*The United States in Literature* 100-102).

On the other hand, it is not surprising because almost no American novels were written before the Revolution and the Revolution brought with it the awakening of a national consciousness that found in Nature its most valuable icon. Thus, in understanding the popularity of Cooper's novel, one cannot ignore the fact that the first explorers and settlers who came to North America from Europe (1600) wrote little. Their descriptions of the continent were centered on its natural beauty, its plants and the customs of the dark-skinned inhabitants already there. In relation to prose, their writings were reports sent to Europe, based on the lives of their small groups of colonists, in which they recorded only the experiences of the Pilgrims who had come from England seeking religious freedom, with the purposes of telling their friends at home about the new land and describing their journey and their social experiment. For a long time there was not any imaginative literature produced in the colonies. Indeed, the colonists of the South did not develop any form of literature, while the Protestants colonists of the North developed a Puritan literature. (*Outline of American History* 1-4). It was only in the beginning of the eighteenth century that newspapers started to appear and books arrived from Europe. Most of them remained focused on religious and political subjects (*Outline of American History* 5-13).

By the end of the eighteenth century, with the Independence of the United States, men turned their attention from religious to political issues. Writers – such as Washington Irving (the first great American writer of stories), William Cullen Bryant (the first poet of the early 1800s) and James Fenimore Cooper - found new energy and inspiration to write. They developed a growing taste for nationalism – which included a revolt against religious and political authority, and the development of a romantic movement and a “native” culture. They

found in Nature the impulse to write. They, and especially Cooper, saw and used Nature not only as an exotic setting of the new land (the frontier), but also as the means through which man's deep feelings could be expressed.

Thus, Cooper's narratives tell the tale of a central character Natty (Nathaniel) Bumppo, a backwoodsman and scout, a "personification of the democrat's ideal of the democratic man" (Spiller 32). Cooper created a major character – Hawkeye, the cowboy-like, legendary WASP, an idealized man close to nature, always ready to help either the whites or the Indians when his presence was needed. For many of his critics, Cooper's view of Nature is close to the Romantic Literary tradition. As stated by John Gehlmann and Mary Rives Bowman, "Cooper's interpretation of nature, the frontiersman, the Indian, is in the Romantic tradition. Nature, he seems to say, is good; civilization is bad. Men who are close to nature – white or red – are noblemen, but those who represent society are corrupt." (503) And as stated by Baker and Sabin about *The Last of The Mohicans*, his novel is best described as an adventure-romance set around events in the war between Britain and France for control of North America in the mid-eighteenth century. As the title implies, the Native American population plays a major role, since different tribes sided with each colonial power. In the book, Cooper offered a picture of a "heritage," of an ideal frontier American and of his opposites – the Indian "savages" and the colonial masters. In doing so, he created not only a 'classic' of modern literature, but also a uniquely American mythology."(16)

Thus, the frontier is the area between settled and wild country. As the continent was explored, inhabited, and cultivated, various images of it developed. According to Henry Nash Smith literature played an important role to create the Western myth. As to Smith, the continent was regarded as no more than a "passage to India," a practical way to reach the Oriental trade, the continent, then, required the help of various experts in wilderness ways, such as guides and hunters. Again according to Smith, the pathfinders, such as Natty Bumppo,

Daniel Boone, and Kit Carson as depicted by Cooper and other writers who were the carriers of the development of urban civilization.

The cultural and literary scenario in which Cooper wrote the *Leatherstocking Tales* justify my proposal to understand John Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* as part of the myth of the Western Frontier and to interpret it as such. As we shall see in details later, in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper portrays the contrast between Good Indians (Mohicans) versus Bad Indians (Hurons), the themes of civilized Europe in conflict with North American natives, the miscegenation of races and how the white man influenced all the natives' lives, as a result of European expansion. Cooper's setting focuses on the wilderness as a virgin land and on his hero. He emphasizes different types of settings: the wilderness, Nature – mountains, falls, rivers –, the frontier, the small town, the forts, and the Indian tribes.

However, Cooper would not have the last word in regard to *The Last of the Mohicans*. On the contrary, the novel has had at least thirteen film versions since its first adaptation in 1909 and until 1992 – not to mention the numerous literary reviews, cultural analyses, and academic dissertations. It is my thesis that, with the exception of the 1920 silent version, in adapting Cooper's work for the screen, the filmmakers have incorporated current popular elements that have little to do with Cooper's original story. They do not reproduce Cooper's plot and they hardly convey the problems involved in Cooper's treatment of the theme. On the contrary, they lose most of the problematic involved in the Western Frontier and the role that Cooper's novel plays within this mythology. They are loose adaptations which take only some ideas, situations, characters or historical elements from the novel. Thus, Baker and Sabin have pointed out in regard to the 1936 version of *The Last of the Mohicans*

It was a radical reworking of the *Mohicans* narrative and, as far as our analysis is concerned, it's one of the most interesting versions for this reason. [...] the fate of Indian tribes is incidental, and the wilderness nonexistent. Instead, the film has three main points of interest: the way it co-opts some of the conventions of the western; the way in which it places U.S. British relations at the center of the story; and the not-so-subtle manner in which capitalism is eulogized. (83)

My aim here is to briefly review the filmic versions of Cooper's novel. Two of them – Seitz's 1936 version and Mann's 1992 version – will be further analyzed and compared to Cooper's novel in later chapters.

It was not a surprise that the foremost medium through which people know *The Last of the Mohicans* was film. The reason was because *Mohicans* was an essential part of American history, and film is the most perfect American medium. The period leading up to the First World War saw cinema established in a permanent fashion, as nickelodeons overtook theaters as the main form of leisure. It is estimated that there were 14,000 nickelodeons, selling more than thirty million tickets a week (Barker and Sabin 56-57).

Although America came to dominate the world market in the postwar years, cinema remained essentially an important medium and Hollywood became known as the “dream factory,” in the sense that Hollywood was the place where celluloid dreams were manufactured, and it was a reflection of the American Dream. Conscious or unconsciously, they returned with frequent repetition to the themes of new beginnings, democracy, individualism, and the frontier. So, they inevitably dealt with the native American, in a genre that was to become an element of the industry – the Western. Thus, Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* became famous because of its reflection “America” (Barker and Sabin 56-57)

The first filmic version of *The Last of the Mohicans* was made in 1909. Two reasons made the 1909 version respectable: it was the first adaptation of the novel and it was directed by one of the most famous film directors of all time – D. W. Griffith, who is considered the founding father of American cinema: “he introduced devices such as crosscutting, the close-ups, dissolves and others” (*The Classical Hollywood Cinema* 157). “*The Last of the Mohicans* was shot on three consecutive days in August 1909 in New York state and was released the very next month” (Barker and Sabin 58).

The 1909 black-and-white “silent” version of *The Last of the Mohicans* was made not only to make money, but beyond that it was designed to fulfill a demand for a particular kind of narrative production. For it appeared at a time when the nature of cinema itself was changing, both artistically and commercially. According to Bordwell in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*,

we may find at least two distinct phases within the primitive period itself [primitive period was the name given to period which began in 1894 with cinema’s commercial origins in 1894 and lasted in 1909]: the earlier (1895-1902) includes primarily one-shot films, with documentaries more numerous than fiction films; after about 1902, multiple-shot films and the increasing use of staged narratives created a more complex approach to filmmaking. Then, from about 1909 to 1916, the transitional phase toward the classical cinema occurred, with the classical paradigm in place by 1917. From that point on, silent cinema history became mainly a matter of adjustments, not basic changes (159).

The 1909 story line has Major Heyward and the two sisters taking a short cut to Fort George accompanied by a scout and led by Magua (Big Serpent). When they rest at a river, Magua and the scout lead the horses in the shade of the wood. The scout returns to tell Hawkeye that he was attacked and that the horses were killed. Hawkeye, Uncas and Chingachgook volunteer to lead them to the fort. They are almost surrounded by Indians, but they managed to escape to the fort, where a battle takes place. Hawkeye disguises himself as a bear and swims the lake and falls exhausted at the soldiers’ quarters. Inside the fort, Chingachgook discovers he has run out of powder. The Indians outside, force and open the gate. After a fight inside, they are all captured, and led out of the fort. Hawkeye and the soldiers arrive to save the survivors. The troops drive off the Indians, and free all the prisoners. Uncas leads the people on their way back, Hawkeye says goodbye to Chingachgook and the film ends with Uncas standing alone on the top of a hill – the last of the Mohicans (Barker and Sabin 62-63).

After Griffith's 1909 version, directors Maurice Tourneur and Clarence Brown made a new version of the novel in 1920. In the 1920s American movies filled the cinema screen of the world. By the 1920s Hollywood had become the film-making capital of the world. Hollywood movies were made by large companies called studios. The men who ran these studios were businessmen and their main aim was to make as much money as possible. When audiences had shown that they liked a certain type of film, the studios made many more of exactly the same kind. Another sure way for a studio to make money was to turn its actors into stars. Stars were actors who were so popular that people went in crowds to see any film they appeared in, no matter how good or bad it was. It was now of the utmost importance to secure a star – thus creating the “star system.” The studios encouraged fan magazines. They set up special publicity departments to get stories about their actors into the newspapers. Thus, Hollywood movies showed people a world that was more exciting than their own. To most people this world of the movies remained a dream world, separate from real life (*Illustrated History of the USA* 94).

So, none of the other versions of *The Last of the Mohicans* were more reliably retelling the story as the 1920. In this silent version, the directors focused on the relationship between Cora and Uncas, with Hawkeye playing a secondary role (Barker and Sabin 65). Although faithful to the novel, they added a villainous British officer who betrays the fort to the French.

In 1924 George Seitz directed a new version of *The Leatherstocking Tales*. He mixed characters from *The Deerslayer* and *the Mohicans*, and portrays historical figures such as Montcalm and George Washington. This version disappeared as it was totally different from the story.

According to David Bordwell in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*,

[T]echnology is an important factor in American film history partly because it sells films. Since at least 1930, Hollywood has promoted mechanical marvels as assiduously

as it has publicized stars, properties, and genres. Sound, color, widescreen 3-D, stereophonic sound, 'Smell-o-vision,' and other novelties were marketing strategies as much as they were technical innovations (243)

Thus, in 1932, director B. Reeves Eason and Ford Beebe produced a version of the novel in which there was a violation of its textual integrity. The film is divided in twelve chapters, and it tells the story of Cora, Alice, their singing teacher, and Major Heyward in their journey through enemy territory. Various members of the party are captured, killed, and burned at the end of each chapter. The daughters are captured many times by Magua or by Dulac and then rescued. The Mohicans and Hawkeye see that justice is done. The Sagamore in this version (Chingachgook) is killed by Dulac and Uncas performs the rituals befitting Hawkeye as the last of the Mohicans (Barker and Sabin 78-79).

In 1936, George Seitz remade his 1924 silent film for United Artists, a large film company.² "The movie was a major Hollywood production, with a big budget, a big star and big pretensions. It was the most lavish film version of *Mohicans* thus far and would remain so until 1992, when Michael Mann film appeared" (Barker and Sabin 83). Even though Dunne's name appears on the credits, he was only partially responsible for the film. Due to his openly liberal politics, "he was subject to witch hunts and blacklists in the 1940s and 1950s, and partly as a consequence, moved increasingly into politics. A passionate defender of the First Amendment, he became a speechwriter for John F. Kennedy" (Barker and Sabin 83). The original script was co-written by Dunne and a noted anglophile, John Balderston. Again, due to studio politics, the script was taken out of their hands and given to an anonymous new group for changes. Dunne was shocked with the result. But if the films had faults, [...]

[I]t was the product of its time, and we should remember that the historical context for movies had changed drastically since the last feature version of *Mohicans* in 1920. Most obviously, in 1936 America was still suffering from the effects of the Great Depression. Unemployment was rife and soup kitchens continued to be a feature of many big cities. The prospect of the country veering toward political extremes –

communism on the one hand and fascism on the other – seemed like a real possibility. If this was the ‘crisis of capitalism’ that Marx had predicted, then the capitalists had better come up with some answers, and quickly (Barker and Sabin 85).

The film industry had changed significantly since the 1920 version of *The Last of the Mohicans*. This was an important economic factor for the movie industry. Alongside that idea, the demands created by the marketing of the films led to their categorization by genre: comedy, thriller, Western, romance and so on. Directors and actors became famous or known for a certain genre and to have the right star for the specific genre was a sure way to success. All this could be assured simply by “getting the right formula.” Noteworthy was also the role of censorship in this emerging industry. More than just morals, censorship also played a political role, as it excluded from films anything that could offend overseas governments. As Europe, a major market for American goods, moved towards war in the late 1930s, American politics became increasingly isolationist and nothing could be shown on film, if it gave the slightest hint of propaganda for American intervention or involvement. The film companies went along with these regulations, up to a point. However, Warner Brothers, for example, “broke ranks after their Berlin agent was murdered by Fascists in 1937. And United Artists, among whose ranks Hollywood’s anti-Nazi league was particularly strong, was also prepared to take on the Hays Office. Therefore United Artists felt it could defy the censors in 1938 over Walter Wanger’s *Blockade*, a film that openly sympathized with the republicans in Spain” (Barker and Sabin 86).

These struggles placed isolationists and interventionists on opposite sides. The first group wanting no dealings with Europe and the second group challenging the Western image of America, in a sort of a battle. It should not be a surprise then, to find some resonances of this battle in the 1936 version of the *Mohicans* produced by the United Artist (Baker and Sabin 85-86).

From 1947 to 1992 the American film industry emerged in a very good form full of confidence and money and “has affected nearly every sphere of Western cultural life, from building design to conceptions of physical beauty [...] and dominated the world’s screens (*The Classical Hollywood Cinema* 378). The 1936 version of *The Last of the Mohicans* was such a success because it redefined notions of what the story was about. Afterwards, two other versions of *Mohicans* were produced – 1947 and 1977 – but were not as successfully accepted as the 1936 and the coming 1992 version. The 1947 version called *The Last of the Redmen* followed the dime novel tradition. The story shows Heyward traveling with a British General’s (Montcalm), two daughters and a twelve year old son (Davy) to Lake George. Magua tells General Webb that the French are attacking from the South. Hawkeye leads the group after Magua leads them in a wrong way. They abandon their horses and baggage and are chased down the river to an island where they hide in a cave. Hawkeye and Uncas go for help, and the group is captured. Hawkeye and Uncas rescue them, and they hide in an abandoned cabin. As they approach the fort, the defeated column is leaving and is attacked by the Indians. Munro is shot. Uncas kills Magua but is wounded and dies. Alice also dies. The troops arrive save the survivor. The Iroquois run. The film ends with Hawkeye standing alone by Unca’s grave. In this version “Uncas is relegated to a kind of Tonto role, while Chingachgook, the most articulated Indian in Cooper’s original, is omitted altogether. When Uncas died, therefore, it really was the ‘last’ of the Mohicans” (Barker and Sabin 98). This film makes no real attempt to show the same thing as its predecessor. Instead, it is an attempt to rework *Mohicans* into a family-oriented romance. With the rise of television by the mid-1970s, a large number of film industries, frightened by the threat of the new medium, turned to the production of TV series, especially producing Western versions³ (Barker and Sabin 93-106).

In 1977, another version of *The Last of the Mohicans* was produced by a small film company. “This is a Disneyesque version [...] in its use of animals to warm the countryside for us. There is no wilderness [...] instead, tamed Nature, with deer, bears, and birds waiting to become our friends. The scenery is never so much wild as empty; but waiting, gently for our arrival in it.” (Barker and Sabin 107). This version opens in a very pleasant way, full of animals and a family being helped by Hawkeye and Chingachgook who introduces himself as “La Longue Carabine.” The father explains to his son what it means and this same father remains the narrator through the film, coming in from time to time in voice-over and as the dialogue proceeds, the camera goes into flashbacks. After that, Magua and his warriors attack the group, and Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Uncas help Major Heyward escort Cora and Alice to their father. There are long fight scenes and a chase on the lake. At Tamenund’s village Cora is given to Magua. The rescuers arrive. Chingachgook kills Magua after Uncas, self-sacrificing to save Cora, is shot by Magua. There are no scenes of the surrender at the fort and no massacre. Cora lives and Gamut is killed. At the end Chingachgook and Hawkeye go back wilderness to find peace.

Thus in 1989, Michael Mann got the rights to produce the 1992 and last version of *The Last of the Mohicans*.⁴ According to Barker and Sabin the retelling of Michael Mann’s version is difficult,

since it is more filmic than any other account of Mohicans. Moving at times very slowly, Mann engenders a powerful mix of moods. [...] They [the characters] are very inward and self-contained most of the time, not showing their feelings and desires through words or actions. Instead the camera in many scenes dwells long on faces as people reveal by their very physicality what they are feeling. [...] There seems to be a continual shifting between bewilderment and determination in the faces of characters. [...] It is a world gone mad, out of control, and people are digging into their inner resources to survive it, or to die in dignity if necessary. (109)

In relationship to myth, Barker and Sabin argue that Mann's version is a failure as it can be considered an adventure film, however it carries some aspects which could be similar to Cooper's intention.

On the other hand, Alan J. Adler, 20th Century Fox Director, emphasizes that

[T]he novel was accurate in its account of the events surrounding the siege and fall of British Fort William Henry to the French, but Mann supplemented this with accounts of the historian Parkman, the diaries of Comte de Bougainville (aide-de-camp to the French commander Montcalm) and other, all the while moving as close to historical accuracy as possible. The desire was to make the period vivid, real and immediate and the characters intelligent, humane and venal as anybody in any timeframe. Necessary allegiance was noted to Native American tribes, for without their assistance no army could have held the field in this harsh, untamed wilderness.
<<http://www.barzso.com/foxlom.html>>

As it is noticeable, the opinions regarding the accuracy are contradictory. Some critics say that Mann was accurate in the accounts of the novel and some say he changed everything.

THE FILM DEVICE

Mise-en-scene

According to David Bordwell, this French term means "staging an action", and "it was first applied to the practice of directing plays [...] Mise-en-scene includes those aspects of film that overlap with the art of the theater: setting, lighting, costume and make up and the behavior of the figures. In controlling the mise-en-scene, the director stages the events for the camera" (*Film Art* 169). According to Bordwell, mise-en-scene is what is put into the scene before or during the shooting and it includes all the elements that are placed in front of the

camera to be photographed. The combination of all those elements bring realism to mise-en-scene, and the illusion of realism is the heart of the film medium (*Film Art* 205).

The Setting

Setting is an element of the mise-en-scene which denotes the location where the film is made. The landscape and the setting are very important to bring realism to a film. These places help to put the characters within a film, and bring meaning to them. “The overall design of a setting can significantly shape how we understand story action” (*Film Art* 174). Director Michael Mann, for example, shot *The Last of the Mohicans* in an open space, “in the dense forests and waterways of the Blue Ridge mountains in North Carolina and in parts of Pennsylvania because the trees were so huge and the canopies so dense, which is characteristic ancient forest.” These elements make the film vivid and realistic way. (<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Theater/5784/heat/3interview.html>)

Another important element of setting is the prop, which, according to David Bordwell, is “an object in the setting that is motivated to operate actively within the ongoing action.” (175). Jill Nelmes states that

Films are also dependent on ‘props’ as a device for conveying meaning. In a familiar sense, props are definers of genre. [...] However, props can also become unique signifiers of meaning in a particular film. While all scenes are constructed around a number of props – to make the sequence ‘look right’- by the use of close-up, and dialogue, our attention can be drawn to particular objects – we know that such objects will be of importance in the narrative.[...] props can also be used to ‘anchor’ characters into particular meanings. In the complexities of possible ways in which an individual character may be read an object may be used to clarify meaning (97-98).

In *Mohicans* it is possible to cite canoes, hats, horses, drums, guns, and fire – elements that are associated and help to define different characters.

Costume, on the other hand, is a variation of the prop, but totally linked to the character, “calling attention to their purely graphic qualities” virtue or evil, status, power (*Film Art* 176). Yet “Since the filmmaker usually wants to emphasize the human figures, setting may provide a more or less neutral background, while costume helps pick out the characters” (*Film Art* 176).

Make up is also an element of mise-en-scene which aims to achieve realism or to express feelings and emotions. It is used in order to increase reality and make the actors’ appearance richer on the screen: “make-up, like costume, becomes important in creating character traits or motivating plot action” (*Film Art* 178).

NOTES

¹ Walter Scott (1771-1832) writes about revolution, history and social changes, and about characters belonging to different social levels in a world of rapid changes, and created exciting plots and characters who are both of their time and beyond their time (Ronald Carter and John McRae 122).

²George B. Seitz (Jan 3, 1888 – July 8, 1944) “a former artist, George B. Seitz became a stage actor and writer in the first decade of the 20th century. Seitz entered films in 1913, writing and directing (or codirecting) such pioneering serials as *The Exploit of Elaine* (1915), *The Iron Claw* (1916) and *Fatal Ring* (1917). Occasionally he acted in these chapter plays, notably in the 1919 serial spoof *Bound and Gagged*. In 1925, Seitz abandoned serials to concentrate exclusively on medium-budget features. Throughout the talkie era, George B. Seitz was gainfully employed by the “B” unit at MGM, where among many other economical second features he directed eleven installments in the “Andy Hardy” series. <<http://www.allmovie.com/cg/x.d11?UID=5:14:10|PM&p=avg&sql=B110709A28329>>

³Perhaps most notable among these films were *Little Big Man* (1970) and *Soldier Blue* (1970) and *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*. These were related to the growth of small film companies, devoted to making TV movies for one or another of the major networks. In 1977, Schick Sunn (TV Movies from NBC) produced Cooper’s *The Deerslayer* and H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1978), Washington Irving’s *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1980), and Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* (1981).

⁴ Michael Mann, a film director, born in Chicago, in 1943, studied at both the University of Wisconsin and the London International Film School before commencing his career in 1965. He started his career on TV commercial, took his rapid-paced, flash-cut approach into documentary filmmaking, producing an award winning short on the 1968

French student riots, *Japuri*. Mann's fragmented-image technique further manifested itself on such TV detective series of the 1970s as *Starsky and Hutch* and *Vegas*, both of which utilized his scripts. Mann turned out another prizewinning project, the 1979 TV movie *The Jericho Mile*, before making his big screen directorial debut with *Thief* (1981). Mann next returned to television, acting as executive producer for the popular TV cop series *Miami Vice* (1984-90). With his film, *The Last of the Mohicans*, "Mann could be said to have entered virgin forest – the realm of the studio blockbuster, although, by current standards, this \$ 35 million colonial pic from Twentieth Century Fox is scarcely exorbitant." (Graham Fuller)

Chapter I

THE MYTH OF THE WESTERN FRONTIER

The Frontier has long been a prominent symbol of American culture. It is a powerful and tempting symbol. Also, the frontier has become a mythical time and place, to the point where it is difficult to distinguish history from myth. Cooper's novel foregrounds the "American Frontier" thus, contributing to reinforce its importance in the landscape of the "American mythology" as the "American Dream." Indeed, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* has been seen as a fictional narrative deeply inserted in the Nineteenth Century American mythology of the Western frontier and has been treated as such by scholars as Henry Nash Smith and Richard Slotkin. To fully grasp the cultural meaning and relevance of the *Leatherstocking Tales*, this chapter attempts to clarify the relationship between Cooper's fictional narratives and its insertion within the mythology of the Western frontier.

In his groundbreaking studies of American mythology, Richard Slotkin states that myths are human creations that have their ultimate source in the human mind in consequence of the natural trend of human beings to make sense, to understand, and to control the world in which they live. ("Dreams and Genocide" 38) In his view, myths are narratives with a special power: they are performative. They can create and do create behaviors; they can guide and they do guide actions. As forms of narratives, myths keep a strong but ambivalent relationship with literature. Myths emerge on narratives of a sub-literary level, but literary narratives may reinforce or alter them in such a way that Slotkin assumes a utilitarian approach of the function of literature, which renders it as a tool used to impact and alter mainstream mythology.

From Slotkin's perspective, human beings are myth-making beings because myth-making is a continuous and uninterrupted psychological and social activity through which, on the basis of

their limited, finite experience, human beings create “a hypothetical vision of a universal, infinite order” that they not only impose on their “perception of the phenomena of nature” and their own behavior, but also test “by acting in accordance with the principles of behavior that seem to be demanded by reality” as they envision it (“Dreams and Genocide” 38-39). Thus, in “Dreams and Genocide,” Slotkin defines myth as:

A story with peculiar powers: it defines the total world-picture of a human culture, summing up the several ways in which men may relate to the Cosmos in a single dramatic instance. It does more than define: it provides a scenario or prescription for action, and limits the possibilities for human response to the Universe. Myths reflect the life of Man, but they also can shape and direct it, for good or ill. They are made of words, concepts, images, and they can kill a man. Myth-narratives reflect and articulate the unconscious assumptions, the habits of thoughts, feeling and vision, which inform the mind of a culture. They draw on the content of individual and collective experience, on the deep structures of human psychology and the particularities of human history, establishing connections between the individual and the archetypal, the singular and the universal (41).

He considers that myths refer to both universals of the human psychology and particular facts of human cultures and histories, building bridges between the past and the future of a people and creating a sense of universality and unchangeable nature. They are guides to behavior and sources of actions, which hold power insofar as they propitiate the belief that we are in control of “the forces that order the world.” Slotkin argues that myths describe processes, credible to their audience, by which knowledge is transformed into power and they provide a scenario or prescription for action, “defining and limiting the possibilities for human response to the universe.” Meanwhile, he also emphasizes that they transfer the psychology and worldviews of a people from generation to generation in such a way and with such power that the perception of contemporary reality and the ability to function in the world are directly affected by past and tradition. Thus, although the world around the people may have changed and may have demanded changes in their psychology, worldview, ethics, and institutions, a people unaware of their myths may continue to live according to them (“Dreams and Genocide” 58).

Slotkin draws three consequences from these conceptions. First, mythology may be defined as “a complex of narratives that dramatizes the world vision and historical sense of a people or culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors,” imposing continuity in the changing process of history, reproducing habits, feelings, beliefs, values and ideals (*Regeneration through Violence* 6). Second, as a cultural entity and a social group, a nation may have its own mythology and the mythology of a nation may be seen as the intelligible mask of that enigma called the national character, because it is through myths that the psychology and worldview of our cultural ancestors are transmitted to modern descendants (“Dreams and Genocide” 57). Third, he considers that American mythology is defined by the myth of regeneration through violence that connects, makes comprehensible and brings together the violence of the frontier settlement and the violence of the Vietnam War (“Dreams and Genocide” 58).

Nevertheless, Slotkin was not the first scholar to pay attention to the narratives that compose the myth of the Western frontier. It has been the object of a voluminous bibliography, among which the contributions of Frederick J. Turner and Henry Nash Smith, whose interpretations radically differ, can be considered paradigmatic.

The next scholar to present the myth of the frontier was Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932), a historian born in Portage, who spent most of his adult life at the University of Wisconsin. He taught at Harvard from 1910 to 1924 before retiring. Turner’s writings on the Western frontier date from the late Nineteenth Century and early Twentieth Century. His writings relate the frontier to the American national character. Turner’s “frontier hypothesis” refers to the argument that accessible free land in the West powerfully shaped the nature of the American society and its people’s national character. The frontier promoted the nation’s most

peculiar experience; it was fundamental to both the nation's economic, political and social characteristics and the people's conception of their destiny. It represented its most distinctive and valuable contribution to the history of the human spirit. Thus, in Turner's major essay on the issue ("The Significance of the Frontier in American History"), he stated:

Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of the American settlement westward explain American development. Behind institutions, behind constitutional forms and modifications, lie the vital forces that call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions. The peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been continent in winning a wilderness and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life. [...] American development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, and its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society furnish the forces dominating the American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast; is the Great West. In this advance, the frontier is the outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilization. But we have in addition to this a recurrence of the process of evolution in each western area reached in the process of expansion. Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating the American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West (Turner's thesis Chapter 1).¹

In Turner's perspective, the history of the settlement of America embraces two phases. Initially, it was the history of the entrance of the European way of life into the continent; later, it was the history of "how America modified and developed that life and reacted towards Europe. Within this perspective, the role of the frontier is remarkable; the advance of settlement towards West was a sociological rather than merely a geographical phenomenon:

The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around

him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick, he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier, the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe. [...] The fact is that there is a new product that is American (Turner's thesis Chapter 1).

Therefore, in Turner's view, the advance of the frontier towards the Great West sociologically meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe and a steady growth of American independence. Turner emphasized that the wilderness put Western settlers under influences that were destructive to many of the gains of civilization and freed them from European precedents and forces. It meant that the Western settler looked at things independently and with small regard for the best Old World experience and traditions; it also meant that they were pushed away from the aristocratic influences of the East and engineered a new type of democracy, which was definitely American. This American democracy built at the frontier was based on the social and economic equality prompted by free lands and the consciousness of working out their social destiny; it drove them to and was reinforced by their individualism, which was precipitated by the anti-social tendency generated by the wilderness and the need to rely on a kind of primitive organization exclusively based on the family's self-reliance (Turner's thesis Chapter 1). Thus, the West, the frontier society, prompted individualism and a composite nationality that kept the country united in spite of the forces of sectionalism; it promoted economic equality and freedom to rise; it nourished democracy and the most striking characteristics of the American intellect: coarseness and strength, acuteness and inquisitiveness, a practical and inventive turn of mind associated with a masterful grasp of material things, a restless and nervous energy combined the buoyancy and exuberance that come with freedom. (Turner's thesis Chapter 1) Thus, in an article printed in 1896, Turner rhetorically asked: "What is the West?" And answered, adequately, summarizing his hypothesis:

The West, at bottom, is a form of society rather than an area. It is the term applied to the region whose social conditions result from the application of older application, a new environment is suddenly entered, freedom of opportunity is opened, the cake of custom is broken, and new activities, new lines of growth, new institutions and new ideals, are brought into existence. The wilderness disappears, the West proper passes on to a new frontier, and in the former area, a new society has emerged from its contact with the backwoods. Gradually this society loses its primitive conditions, and assimilates itself to the type of the older social conditions of the East; but it bears within it enduring and distinguishing survivals of its frontier experience. Decade after decade, West after West, this rebirth of American society has gone on, has left its traces behind it, and has reacted on the East. The history of our political institutions, our democracy, is not a history of imitation, of simple borrowing; it is a history of the evolution and adaptation of organs in response to changed environment, a history of the origin of new political species. In this sense, therefore, the West has been a constructive force of the highest significance in our life (Turner's thesis Chapter VII).

Nevertheless, in this same article and in a later one, he grasped the limitations of his frontier hypothesis when he paid attention to changes that had recently occurred in the American development – namely the exhaustion of the supply of free land that closed the frontier, the concentration of capital in the control of fundamental industries, the political and commercial overseas expansion of the United States, and the ideological division of the American political parties on issues related to the question of socialism. Thus, he pointed out that as “the free lands are gone, the continent is crossed,” and then “all this push and energy is turning into channels of agitation” (Turner's thesis Chapter VII).

The other major historian to study the myth of the Western frontier was Henry Nash Smith, who was born on September 29, 1906, in Dallas, Texas. He received a B.A. from Southern Methodist University in 1926 and an M.A. from Harvard in 1929. In 1940, Harvard awarded him a Ph.D. in American Studies. His career centered on college teaching, and he held posts at Southern Methodist University, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis, and the University of California at Berkeley, where he was accorded the status of professor emeritus in 1974. He wrote *The Virgin Land: The American West as*

Symbol and Myth (1950) for which he received the John H. Dunning Prize from the American Historical Society in 1951, as well as the Bancroft Prize from Columbia University in that same year. In 1960, Smith received an award for distinguished scholarship in the humanities from the American Council of Learned Societies.

In his *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, Smith sees the myth of the frontier in terms of the function and the impact of the West on the American imagination and consciousness as well as on the shaping of American society, national character and pride. He considers the mythology of the frontier as a cultural force. Throughout the Nineteenth Century in contraposition to the supremacy in America of contemporary European theories of civilization – which relegated settlers of the frontier to low social status and hindered acknowledgement of what was actually new and vigorous about American institutions – and sustained an agrarian utopia. Nevertheless, he also emphasizes the inability of this mythology to grasp, to resist and to survive the economic and social forces – industrialization and urbanization – that came to dominate and to shape the nation at the late Nineteenth Century, thus stressing its limitation and contradictions. Smith sees the mythology of the frontier as a twofold force involving two contradictory narratives: (a) the representation and romantic idealization of the West and its paradigmatic figure of the hunter/pathfinder hero, among which he includes James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking character, and (b) the myth of "the Garden of the World" that set the moral and social superiority of the yeoman farmers' way of life. He argues that there was an abyss between the fictional and the political appeal held by each one of these two narratives and their representative characters: (1) the pathfinders as independent individual and (2) the farmers who had to create links within one specific piece of land.

On the fictional dimension, while the tamed West of the yeoman farmers proved extremely difficult to be brought into fictional expression and to be imagined as heroic, because

they faced the aristocratic disdain of Eastern observers and cultivated classes, which constituted the bulk of the reading public in Nineteenth Century America, the wild West of pathfinders and hunters earned great enthusiasm from the cultivated public who shared the Byronic cult of savagery (Smith Chapter 5).² It is in the context of this fictional expression of the mythology of the frontier that Nash Smith interprets the Leatherstocking's narratives, to which he dedicates the second part of his work, entitled "The sons of the Leatherstocking's." He points out how Nineteenth Century historical and literary narratives have depicted the figures of the hunter and the pathfinder, Daniel Boone and Leatherstocking being paradigmatic, as those who lead the way into the frontier, thus considering the impact of these figures and myths on the attitudes toward the settlement of the West, from a sociological perspective.³ For Smith, the figure of the hunter and the pathfinder helped to form the Nineteenth Century views of the nation. According to Smith, pathfinders and hunters were heroic figures insofar as they were symbols of anarchic freedom and represented as well as mediated the antithetical forces which have governed the representation of the American West – "nature and civilization, freedom and law, the advance of agricultural settlement into the wilderness, the freedom of the frontier and the necessary order of society" (Smith Chapter XI). In being so, and in spite of all the abyss between the yeoman figure, on the one hand, and the pathfinder and hunter, on the other, the former were also inserted in the mythology of "the Garden of the World", which also implied the relationship between man and nature, the conception of the fortunate plenitude of the life at the frontier and the distrust of industrialization and urbanization.

Since the character of the American empire was defined by the relation between man and nature, being the yeoman farmer the virtue, the myth of the garden implied the fortunate plenitude and being so, industrialization and urbanization could only be seen as evil. In other words, virtue was within the garden and whatever else, outside of the garden was considered evil

influences. This formulation is isolationist and places domestic society as self-reliant, classless and homogeneous. It creates an inability to deal with the tragic aspects of the human experience such as disaster and suffering and denies the forces of world economy.

On the mythological dimension, however, Smith proposes that the relevance of these mythological narratives were inverted. The myth of “the garden of the world” and its impersonators – the yeoman farmer – remained at the center stage of national politics, and Smith argues that the narratives of the wild West were less relevant on the shaping of the American nation than transmission of both the myth of the West as “the garden of the world” and the figure of the yeoman farm, in which a virtuous democratic and good society could take root and would grow up around the agricultural labor. Thus, in chapter XI, he argues that:

The westward march of the pioneer army and the fantastic adventures of the dime novel heroes were of only indirect influence on American social and economic development. Of most effect on the attitudes toward the West was the activity of communities busy transforming the interior recesses of the continent into the Garden of the World: plowing the virgin land, putting in crops, and growing an agricultural society centered around the yeoman frontier farm and his sacred tool, the plow. The myth of the Garden long gave powerful social and political credence to the idea that the real America was an agrarian paradise.

In his analysis of the role of the frontier in the shaping of the American nation and national character, Nash Smith also emphasizes the historical changes that occurred in the cultural power held by the mythology of the frontier throughout the Nineteenth Century. He stresses the ability of the myth of yeomanry, at the first two thirds of the century, to shape policy, law and hegemonic ideology opposing and limiting the expansion of the slave-holding plantation system – as reflected on: (i) the adoption of the “safety valve” theory as the official doctrine by the Republican Party by the 1850s, (ii) the Homestead Act in the 1860s and (iii) the agrarian social theory that had been implicit in the writings of the Founding Fathers of the Nation, who saw agriculture as the only source of real wealth, supported every man’s right to own land, and believed that labor in the soil

yielded independence and virtue. Nevertheless, he also points out the failure of this mythology and this agrarian utopia to enforce a national policy on behalf of the rural settlers by the end of the Nineteenth Century.⁴ It is at this point that Nash Smith turns to Turner's essay "Significance of the Frontier in American History," which he considers as both a summation of the central tenets of Nineteenth Century American agrarianism and as a case study on the contradictions and theoretical dead-ends of the agrarian ideal (Smith Chapter 22).

In Smith's view, Turner's "frontier hypothesis" expressed one of the predominant theorizations of American identity – the view of the American society as having been shaped by the westward pull of a vacant continent and the view of the American democracy as having come out of the American forest, from a recurring rejuvenation of man and society along the frontier. It also contained all the contradictions that hampered the "safety valve" because his system implied that the post-frontier society contained no force tending toward democracy (Smith, Chapter 20). Thus, Nash Smith concluded that Turner's frontier hypothesis shared the erroneous appraisals of the myth of "the garden of the world" in regard to the economic forces that had come to dominate late Nineteenth Century American society, expressing the aspirations of a people rather than their actual situation, and was hampered by his need to reconcile his belief that the highest social values were to be found in agricultural frontier communities with his conviction that society evolves and improves.

Smith's work *The Virgin Land* could be interesting for those people interested in the basic themes of American history or in the popular literature which aimed to describe life in the American frontier. Nevertheless, the scope of the work is far less than what the title suggests. There is no consideration of such factors as gold rushes, cattle industries, Indian life or industrial expansion on the Pacific coast. On the other hand, Turner's vision about the frontier is that of a free land built in a most romanticized way by settlers who battled setbacks which in turn made

them stronger, giving an impression that those individuals were acting mostly disconnected. These individuals were strong, acute, and eager to conquer; they had practical inventive turn of mind and were quick to find expedients; they had a masterful grasp of material things. They were restless and possessed nervous energy which he concluded were the influence of the frontier. He believed individualistic democracy was the most important effect of the frontier. His work has been disputed and the idea of free land regarding to frontier has been argued that the opposite was the case since cooperation and communities of different sorts and not isolated individuals made possible the absorption of the west into the United States.

For Turner “the existence of an area of free land” theory implies that the frontier is the place to be conquered, although he leaves no room for the Native Americans in the process of “Americanization” and in this struggle for progress. He writes “the wilderness masters the colonist.” It finds him in “European dress, industries, tools, modes of travel and thought” (Chapter 1). Turner compares the conquering of the frontier with symbols of North American culture. In conclusion, for Turner the Native Americans were the contrast in the Western frontier that the settlers had to adjust or to conquer.

On the other hand, professor Henry Nash Smith, deals in the first part of his book with the dream of a passage to India – a commercial trade linking the Atlantic and the Pacific. The linkage of civilization with the trade routes gave a motivation to the sense of national destiny.

On the second part he studies the Western hero in history and literature and shows how these heroes are related to the primitivism and civilization. The third part “The Garden of the World” is proved to be more myth than reality. The agrarian utopia, the land open for homesteads were substituted by lack of water or lack of suitable markets.

Even though Turner and Smith had different views about the Westward expansion, they were aware of the Indian wars, but both scholars ignored the most important component of

Westward expansion: the violence. For them violence was naturally linked to the progress and expansion.

Having considered Turner's and Smith's views of the myth of the frontier, we can come back to Richard Slotkin's comments. As I said from the beginning, Slotkin considers James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* as a component part of the myth of the frontier. I now may add that he sees the myth of the frontier only as a key component of the most enduring and more encompassing mythology of regeneration through violence, which he defines as presenting the following paradigmatic pattern:

The American in his pastoral country, troubled by an obscure malaise, a sense of weakness and threat, finds in the first assault on his world and values the concretion of all terrors and villainies, both cosmic ones and ones which are intimate parts of his own family or his own being. His world view polarizes, he suddenly perceives his role in the drama as that of victim; he purifies and strengthens himself, feeding his wrath on the sense of his difference from his enemy and an exaggerated sense of his being that enemy's helpless captive. Then he ceases to be victim and becomes avenger, exorcizing and destroying utterly all demons, all jungles where demons might lurk ("Dreams and Genocide" 51).

Slotkin sees this myth of regeneration through violence as the core of American mythology and national character. Indeed, in his view, this mythology defines the American national character. To reach this conclusion, Slotkin analyses the American literary narratives produced from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries. He analyses the cultural and historical scenario of the early encounters between Puritan colonists and Indian communities, the captivity mythology, the hunter, the frontier, Boone and the Leatherstocking myths, picturing the emergence of a national hero whose power refers to the power of redeeming himself and his nation through self-restraint and violent purification. Slotkin has argued that the mythology of regeneration through violence springs from the situation in which Puritan colonists came to America and entered in contact with its wilderness and the Native-American people who

embodied it and its evils – an encounter in which the two populations failed to reach mutual understanding because they came from very different stages of mythological the evolution. Thus, he states:

The mythology of regeneration through violence developed in the colonial literature of the northern American colonies in the 17th Century, in response to the peculiar situation in which the Puritan colonists had placed themselves, on the frontier of an uncharitable wilderness, rich in possibilities of terror and opulence, and haunted by a dark-skinned race whose Gods were so strange as to seem devils (“Dreams and Genocide” 38).

He points out that the colonists did not reach America with entirely easy minds, because:

In order to come to the New World they had first to uproot themselves from their traditional places in English society, breaking ties of love, kinship, filial obligation, legal duty and customary associations in order to recreate their lives in terms more suited to their personal ideals and ambitions. In a time of general social upheaval, of people rising and falling out of their appropriate spheres, these people committed the most outrageous act, by rising totally out of the sphere of English society itself (“Dreams and Genocide” 39).

As a consequence, their activities were Faustian, because they chose for the opportunity to create a new world of their own rather than submitted themselves to the world as God had given to them; “in this ambition, they were opposed by their spiritual leaders and temporal rulers, their fellow congregants and business associates, and by the naggings of their own consciences” and they “doubted their own motives: were they going, as they said, to redeem the Satanic forest for Jesus, or were they self-seekers, degenerate in virtue” (“Dreams and Genocide” 39)?⁵ The conception of an original sense of sin and need of redemption that were rampant among the Puritan colonists is crucial to Slotkin’s interpretation of American mythology as being defined by the narratives of regeneration through violence and guides his analysis of the different narratives (previously mentioned) that compose the myth of regeneration through violence to which he associates – building the mythological bridge between the particular and the universal – the archetypal myth of the scapegoat.⁶

From Slotkin's work on American mythology, four of his arguments must be emphasized: the first refers to the pattern of mythological narrative that he finds at work since the early captivity narratives of the Seventeenth Century; the second refers to his description of the hunter myth in which the figures of Daniel Boone and Leatherstocking are inserted; the third refers to the place he attributes to the frontier myth and its hunter and pathfinder heroes in American mythogenesis; and, the fourth refers to his conclusion in regard to the endurance of the myth of regeneration through violence in American mythology.

Initially, we shall consider that the captivity narratives center on the fate of white women – ordinarily the mother that embodies familial virtues and values – who are carried captive into the wilderness during Indian raids, captivity narratives also focus on how the captive try to keep their spiritual integrity by resisting temptations of the Indian lifeway, how they come to conceive of the Indians as “concretions of their sins” (pride, sensuality, complacency, selfishness and desire for prosperity and comfort) rather than “foreign devils” how they come to see themselves as damned, how they are rescued and how their rescue is always incomplete, implying “the need for constantly recurring and expanding cycles of the myth” and the “expectation of further captivities and rescues, more complete exorcisms of Indian guilt, more total purgation's of the soul and the world” (“Dreams and Genocide” 43-44).

Besides, we shall understand that, in Slotkin's view, the hunter myth – whose most popular forms “began to develop in the 1720's and culminated in a literary Trinity of Heroes: Daniel Boone, Leatherstocking, and David Crockett” – added to the captivity narratives the heroic overtones they missed, which were a part of the common life of the colony, and which were required to make the mythical narrative a truly satisfying and respectable picture of the colonist's world.⁷ The hunter myth differs from the captivity narrative because it involves a hero who willingly enters the wilderness. Hunting beasts and Indians bring him closer to the Indian's

way of living and experiencing the wilderness. The hunter is already half-civilized, half-Indian.

Slotkin argues:

This quality is the source of his power; but is also a defect in his virtue, since it compromises his racial purity. Thus the frontier hunter is often seen as low, coarse, rude-spoken, antisocial, outlawed or socially inferior. What redeems him finally for the American audience is his ability to maintain some degree of racial integrity – this is attested by his qualities of self-restraint, his racial pride, and his maintenance of celibacy; and finally, by his association with captivity, both by suffering captivity himself and by his rescuing of the Mary Rowlandsons from savage molestation“ (“Dreams and Genocide” 44).

Furthermore, we shall keep in mind the relevance that Slotkin attributes to these mythical heroes on the American mythogenesis, quoting again:

In American mythogenesis the founding fathers were not those eighteenth century gentlemen who composed a nation at Philadelphia. Rather, they were those who tore violently a nation from the implacable and opulent wilderness – the rogues, adventurers, and land-boomers. The Indian fighters, missionaries, explorers, and hunters who killed and were killed until they had mastered the wilderness; the settlers who came after, suffering hardship and Indian warfare for the sake of a sacred mission or a simple desire for land; and the Indians themselves, both as they were and as they appeared to the settlers, for whom they were the special demonic personification of the American wilderness. Their concerns, their hopes, their terrors, their violence, and their justifications of themselves, as expressed in literature, are the foundation stones of the mythology that informs our history (“Dreams and Genocide” 44).

Finally, we shall consider that from Slotkin’s perspective this mythological narrative has passed the real test of the myths; it has retained its power to express and shape the American culture as well as to be serviceable as a paradigm of American worldview a lapse of centuries later. In doing so, first Slotkin shows that narratives of Indian warfare and captivity retained their huge popular appeal until 1890 and beyond (through comic books and movies), proving “that succeeding generations of Americans have found such stories relevant to their conception of their place in the universe, and symbolic of their character and values.”⁷ Then he traces parallels between the narratives of genocidal exorcisms made by Civil War heroes and Vietnam War veterans and goes on to conclude that “these parallels in the ways in which such different events

are seen signal the presence of some underlying structure of ideas or myths” – namely, the paradigmatic myth of regeneration through violence that narrates a Cosmic rather than local, a universal rather than particular struggle of men against their devils, a cyclical (each time more profound and more damaging) exorcism. Thus, Slotkin states:

I don't mean to say that the myth I have described, or the psychological states the myth reflects, are uniquely American. Obviously this is not the case: the scapegoating mentality is common to all minds and all cultures, and is in fact archetypal. Other cultures, for other reasons, have exhibited the same tendency to pattern their worldviews in terms appropriate to the rite of casting out evil.[...] The myth of regeneration through violence defines one major component of the American mind, one stream of American consciousness, one major characteristic conception of history and the cosmos held by Americans. Under certain conditions of stress, the myth emerges from our personal and social unconscious to define, motivate and rationalize behavior. It does not seem an evil thing, a state of mind similar to that of Nazi Germany, because it is an American myth: it carries with it images and associations which are beneficent, heroic, noble – Cluster's Last Stand, Remember the Alamo, the cavalry rescuing the wagon train” (“Dreams and Genocide” 58).

The Last of the Mohicans is indeed part of the myth of the frontier in a way that it contributes to show the evolution of American history as it explores one of the greatest American myths. This greatest myth is the idea of the frontier, a conflicting place where many dreams and nightmares gather. For the settlers, the dream held the idea of the New Beginning, as they wanted progress and also wanted to tie themselves to the land they possessed. On the other hand, for the Indians this dream represented a nightmare as it meant the beginning of an end. It is this tragic meeting of differences encountered on the frontier which gives power to Cooper's novel.

Notes

¹ Turner's thesis was obtained from Internet, so it is impossible to cite page number. Hereafter I will cite only the chapter.

² Lord (George Gordon) Byron (1788-1824) was one of the most influential and, for many, is one of the most typical Romantic poets in England. He was a great influence across Europe in the nineteenth century. His picture of the romantic hero, an isolated individual who attacks social conventions and challenges the authorities of the age and who searches for peace and happiness (Ronald Carter and John Mc Rae 117). The cult of Byron was born, perhaps, on March 10th 1812, the morning when – as he later wrote- “I awoke and found myself famous.” His *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* had gone on sale, and its young writer was suddenly the rage of fashionable London. So numerous were the carriages waiting to deliver invitations that they held up the traffic outside his rented apartment. Everywhere, everyone wanted to meet the poet and traveler, who had added to his notoriety with a radical speech in the House of Lords. He was considered “mad” as he appeared at parties, “dressed in black, hellishly pale and poetic, a metropolitan *Hamlet* who specialized, he soon gave notice, in country matters” <<http://www.saqnet.co.uk/kurnada/byronlife.htm>>.

³ Daniel Boone was one of the restless pioneers who pushed westward through the wilderness. He was responsible for the exploration and settlement of Kentucky. Daniel was born on Nov. 2, 1734. He had no regular schooling, but he learned about cattle, horses, wagons, blacksmith, and weaving. An aunt taught him to read and write. He was destined to become a man of the wild, an explorer of unmapped spaces, when he was twelve, his father gave him a rifle, and his career as a huntsman began. He was quite a complex character who, following his instincts, was ready to lead when required, not averse to fame, but above all trying to marry his love of the hunt and the wilderness with his responsibilities to his family. His happiness was the life of the frontier. The prospect of a new start in a fresh land, lifted his spirit. He was an interesting character who helped to explore and settle the new country in the wilderness.

⁴ “free soil” and “safety valve” theories, the Homestead Act [The Act, allowed anyone to have a free land (160 acres). The land would belong to the owner at the end of five years if he had built a house on it, dug a well, broken 10 acres, fenced a specific amount, and was actually living there] and the reform of the public land system, and, last but not least, Turner's frontier hypothesis. The “safety valve” theory assumed that free land in the West reduced

class conflicts in the urban industrialized Northeastern coast, because it encouraged unemployed and underpaid laborer to leave industrial cities, eliminating the surplus of workingmen. It was described the land as a new beginning for those released from the industrial regime of the east. There was no room for Native Americans . Nash Smith considers it as ideological rather than descriptive, pointing out that very few settlers of the agricultural frontier, who lacked the money needed to transport to the free public lands and the farming abilities, came from eastern industrial centers. He also states that the “safety valve”theory implied that the ultimate disappearance of free land would make the ills of industrialization, urbanization and class struggle inevitable and rampant. The Homestead Act derived from the adoption of the safety valve theory as the official doctrine of the Republican Party and granted free homesteads for actual settlers. Nash Smith that the system collapsed under the pressure of big business by the late Nineteenth Century, when at least 60% of all American farmers had become tenants aand many others carried heavy mortgages.

⁵ The Faustian image, was a part of the common life of the colony: the bravery of the pioneer. The image of the courageous man.

⁶ According to Slotkin, “the myth of the regeneration through violence is a variation on the archetypal myth and ritual of the scapegoat, which is itself the reflection of a basic psychological mechanism for dealing with anxiety and guilt” (“Dreams and Genocide” 49).

⁷ David Crockett is a legend. He has become a tall-tale over the years and has become known for his hunting, scouting, and woodcraft. Even today he is recognized by his coonskin cap, his moccasin shoes, and his buckskin clothing. He lived by his motto, “Be sure you’re right, then go ahead”
<<http://www.norfacad.Pvt.k12.va.us/project/crockett/crockett.htm>>.

CHAPTER II

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO FILMIC VERSIONS: 1936 AND 1992 IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE NOVEL *THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS*

The American Tradition in Literature states that in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* "the American frontier hero, first materialized to run his limitless course to the present day, through the romance, the dime novel, drama, movies and television," contributed to the romantic notion of American frontier life, forming a prose epic of the conquest of America (524). Natty, as the hero of the tales, embodies the conflict between preserving nature unspoiled and developing the land in the name of progress. He is a white frontiersman with ties to the settlers, but spending much of his time in the wilderness with Native American.

In *The Last of the Mohicans* Cooper pictures the ideal American frontier in contrast with the savage Indians. The novel creates a powerful myth of early America – with brave and capable frontiersmen, wicked and noble savages, wide beautiful virgin forests versus the destruction of civilization. The description of the landscape and the sense of wilderness can be seen as the main subject that helped to make *The Last of the Mohicans* to be considered a masterpiece in the history of American art, as the author linked it to the "American Dream" of exploring the frontier and the near destruction it represented to the native American population.

The Last of the Mohicans is indeed part of the myth of the frontier in a way that it contributes to the evolution of American history as it explores the idea of the frontier – a conflicting place with many dream and conflicts. For the settlers, the dream held the idea of

the New Beginning, as they wanted progress and also wanted to tie themselves to the land they possessed. It is this tragic meeting of differences encountered on the frontier which gives power to Cooper's novel.

From now on this chapter aims at exploring **How Cooper's treatment of the frontier and the frontier hero and the nation were treated in his work *The Last of the Mohicans* and how it was adapted into the two film versions made in 1936 and 1992.** Also, how mise-en-scene and setting in George B. Seitz's 1936 and in Michael Mann's 1992 filmic adaptations convey the theme of frontier in relationship to Cooper's novel. Since the frontier is the place to be conquered, tamed and possessed, as mentioned before, the primary conflict seen in the plot of Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans* is:

The conflict between Whites and Indians

The frontier, to the white immigrants, was connected to the idea of "opportunity". This "new start" took place in the area as the pioneers called the "Garden of the World" a utopia. Land was the central focus to the settlers. They wanted to establish a home, a place for their family. But the ideal of home and place established a conflict between civilization and wilderness. To establish themselves, the whites used any means necessary, including violence to remove the native Americans from their homes. Even though the American government tried to protect the native Americans, establishing that they should be respected and that their lands and properties should never be taken from them, the white expansion did not take the native into account. The whites broke the treaties and the natives had to migrate further and further West, provoking, as a result, lots of wars among them, making the Indians weaker. They were confined to a small reservation at the Great Plains. The last to be

defeated by the whites was the Apache, led by Geronimo, which took fifteen years and five hundred troops against them (Barker and Sabin 7-15).

The whites have broken promises, spread diseases, and brutally pushed back the frontier, and the Native Americans were ignored as soon as the West had been conquered. As a consequence, the Indians threw themselves into alcoholism and suicide.

The conflict of good Indians and bad Indians

Cooper is very careful to ensure that the Indians are not one-dimensional figures, and he writes great descriptions of their culture and customs. Some of the Natives are portrayed as noble and some as savage. If we take into account the description of Uncas:

At a little distance in advance stood Uncas, his whole person thrown powerfully into view. The travelers anxiously regarded the upright, flexible figure of the young Mohican, graceful and unrestrained in the attitudes and movements of nature. Though his person was more than usually screened by a green and fringed hunting skirt, like that of the white man, there was no concealment to his dark, glancing fearful eye, alike terrible and calm; the bold outline of his high haughty features, pure in their native red; or to the dignified elevation of his receding forehead, together with all the finest proportions of a noble head, bared to the generous scalping tuft (LOTM 61).

It is noticeable that the words used by Cooper reveal a clear comparison of the Indian with Nature, as pure and noble. On the other hand, when he talks about Magua, and the Hurons, Cooper stresses on violence, and the most violent evidence is when one of the Hurons wants a woman's "gaudy" shawl, took her baby out of her arms, and kills it: "The savage spurned the worthless rags, and perceiving that the shawl had already become a prize to another, his bantering but sullen smile change to a gleam of ferocity, he dashed the head of the infant against a rock, and cast its quivering remains to her very feet" (LOTM 207).

Throughout the novel the two opposing forces (good and savage Indians) are constantly fighting each other. Cooper did not want to see the extinction of the Indians. However he considers it a natural way of colonizing the land. As stated by Barker and Sabin “in this sense, the Indians are a metaphor for the rise and fall of civilizations [...] and this notion of ‘progressive history’ is underscored by the climactic speech by Tamemund, when he laments: ‘The pale-faces are masters of the earth, and the time of the red men has not yet come again...’” (22).

The conflict between the English and the French

The central concern in Cooper’s novel is a struggle for power, for control of the new nation. Cooper makes clear that European motives are responsible for the action of his narrative. The American frontier was the stage where England and France had to battle the wilderness first before they fight each other to conquer the land.

The true story about the conflict between the English and the French

According to D. Martin in his article “Historical Background”, the true story about the conflict between the English and the French is that Lake George was an area of wilderness separating the English and the French territory. North of the lake was Fort Carillon (guarding French Canada). South of the lake was Fort Edward (marking the northernmost point of the English push north). The English had won control of the lake in a battle with the French in 1755. They built a road linking Fort Edward to the lake. Fort William Henry was built to protect the lake, guard the road and act as a launching point in battles against the French.

In 1756, General Daniel Webb assumed the command of the Fort, planning an offensive against the French. At both ends of the lake British and French were preparing for a

battle. Raids, counter-raids and scouting missions occurred over the next year. In 1757, General Marquis de Montcalm, French Commander of Fort Carillon, begins maneuvering to take Fort William Henry from the English, which was led by Lieutenant Colonel George Monro.

- On August 2nd, the French were slowly moving toward the Fort, building a road and entrenchments on the way. On August 7th, a message from Webb to Monro denying reinforcements and encouraging his surrender was intercepted by the French. Montcalm's aid-de-camp, Captain Bougainville, approached the English with this letter offering truce if they surrendered. On August 9th, Fort William Henry's officers met and later posted a flag of truce over the Fort. Montcalm gave generous terms of surrender:
 - All the troops could retreat to Fort Edward
 - They could fly their colors and take a cannon
 - Their sick and wounded people would be returned when they were well
 - British had to promise not to fight for eighteen months
 - One British officer had to remain hostage until a French escort going with the troops returned.

However, the European agreement disappointed the Indians. Their usual reward for participation in battle was the booty of enemy supplies, alcohol, and weapons. After the British evacuated, the Indians attacked the fort in order to take what was left behind. Several of the wounded still living there were killed, but the French troops restored order. On August 10th, the English assembled by companies for the march back to Fort Edward with a French escort of two hundred men. When they left, the Indians attacked them, and this attack was called a "slaughter" that went on for up to three hours.

At the end, the French burned Fort William Henry, even though today a reconstruction of it stands there. The site Fort Edward is now marked only with a few historical landmark signs, and Fort Carillon (also known as Ticonderoga) still stands today as it did then. (*Last of the Mohicans – Historical Background* <<http://ppl.Woodstock.edu/~dmartin/HISTORY%20th...Last%of%Mohicans.htm>>).

Within this framework, Cooper created his bloodiest fictional adventure narrative which focuses on the conflict between civilization and savagism, the extinction of the Native Americans in the name of progress that irresistibly pushed the frontier westward.

The novel can be divided into three parts:

The first part of the story is about how Hawkeye's group, which was running from the Iroquois, managed to reach Fort William Henry – commanded by Colonel Munro – which was under siege by the French and by the Huron Indians (Mingoes). The second part starts when Colonel Munro found out that General Webb was not sending reinforcements and is forced to surrender. When the troops left the Fort, the Indians began a bloody massacre and Magua escaped with the two Munro's daughters. The final and most important part of the story had Hawkeye, Uncas, Chingachgook, Munro and Heyward looking for the two sisters. The group ended up in Delaware village where the girls were captive and Uncas was revealed to be the last of the rightful chiefs of the Mohicans, the race from which the Delaware descended. Tamenund welcomed Uncas as the chief who would succeed him, and Tamenund gave Cora to Magua as his prize. Magua escaped with Cora who did not want to be Magua's squaw. Magua killed Uncas and Cora is killed by another Indian. Hawkeye shot Magua who fell from a precipice to his death.

In the last chapter of the book, at the Delaware camp, Cooper describes a deep sadness since everybody was in a silent circle around their dead. Chingachgook lamented his noble son's death and Colonel Munro his daughter's. The Indians buried Cora and Uncas. All the whites left except Hawkeye, who answered Chingachgook's speech:

As for me, the son and the father of Uncas, I am a blazed pine, in a clearing of the palefaces. My race has gone from the shores of the salt lake, and the hills of the Delawares. But who can say that the serpent of his tribe has forgotten his wisdom? I am alone."

"No, no," cried Hawkeye, who had been gazing with a yearning look at the rigid feature of his friend, with something like his own self-command, but whose philosophy could endure no longer. "No Sagamore, not alone. The gifts of our colors may be different, but God has so placed us as to journey in the same path. I have no 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 fought as 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."

Chingachgook grasped the hand that, in the warmth of feeling, the scout had stretched across, the fresh earth, and in that attitude of friendship these two sturdy and intrepid woodsmen bowed their heads together, while scalding tears fell to their feet, watering the grave of Uncas like drops of falling rain (*LOTM* 414).

Tamenund's words finished the novel: "before the night has come, have I lived to see the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans"(*LOTM* 415).

The conclusion to this tragic story may be emphasized by Cooper that miscegenation may exist in the frontier, even if he did not allow neither Uncas no Magua to marry Cora. However, through the symbolic act of grasping the hands, Cooper may mean that differences can live and survive together, if their individuality is respected.

James Fenimore Cooper did not predict that his book would become a classic, and transformed into so many filmic versions, however, each one of them has a different approach as it is the case of George Seitz's 1936 version.

The 1936 filmic version:

The story line has Cora and Alice escorted by Major Duncan Heyward and the Indian Magua to the Fort under siege by the French. An ambush leaves the three of them without protection, but they are rescued by Hawkeye, Uncas and Chingachgook, who take them to the Fort. In this version, two pairs of lovers, Hawkeye and Cora and Uncas and Alice fall in love. Cora is portrayed as dark-haired and Alice as blond. After the surrender, the Hurons attack the Fort and then comes the chase and the capture. Magua kills Uncas, and Alice jumps to her death after Uncas. It is important to mention at this point that before dying, Uncas tries to hold her hand, as a symbol of what was not solved in life, will probably be in death. Their death prevents them from suffering because of the mixture of the races. Chingachgook kills Magua and disappears. Hawkeye is captured, tortured, but he is saved by the arrival of the troops at the last minute. Hawkeye joins the British Army and leaves for Canada.

I am going to select three sequences to analyze which are related to the frontier, and the frontier hero:

The frontier – as a geographic and open space – is almost inexistent in Seitz's version, since most of the scenes are indoors. When Alice and Hawkeye are at the river, fixing their canoe, Hawkeye tells the girl how he lost his parents when he was young. His parents were settlers, and an Indian attack destroyed his family, thus allowing him to be raised by the Mohicans. Alice, then, tells him she is not afraid when she is with him, as he represents the frontiersman and knows where they are. She says: "I am with you and I think you know where we are about the woods." He answers: "Yes, I know, Mohicans raised me. I never saw another settlement till I was ten." She asks: "Aren't you curious about the rest of the world? London, for instance?" He answers as a pathfinder: "A man can spend a lifetime exploring this country and never walk the same trail twice. Men have only touched them. Beyond the

Ohio there's a land where no white man has ever been. Every time I open up a new trail I like to think others will follow. May be some day big cities will be built. I wonder if you can understand what it means to be the first" (1936 filmic version). This is the most important dialogue in the film, showing what the wilderness represents to the trailblazer. The pleasure of being the first is seeing the possibility of a civilizing process. This is the role of a trailblazer. He opens up a way for the white people to begin civilization. Being the first means to start a process. The process of marking the land to receive the settlers. The settlers mark the land with history, with the unique identity of their new land. For the frontiersman and for the settlers, being the first is an involvement between wilderness and civilization and their attitudes to both.

Another important sequence to comment on is when Hawkeye and Heyward are in the wilderness talking, trying to find a way to save Alice. Hawkeye wants to offer himself as exchange. Heyward, on the other hand, knocks Hawkeye out, takes his clothes, trying to be a hero, and goes to the camp. He introduces himself as Hawkeye, but the chief does not believe him, because Hawkeye is a warrior and has always his long gun with him. Hawkeye arrives wearing Heyward's British uniform, assuming his true identity as British, and confuses the old chief. Alice refuses to identify the true Hawkeye. The old chief proposes a contest, and, of course, Hawkeye wins with his best shot. He is chosen to die in fire. He says good bye to Alice who leaves with Heyward. This is a very symbolic sequence, because it shows female Indians torturing him and, with long torches, setting the fire. He is naked, free from either uniforms or his traditional pathfinder clothes, a pure man showing his masculinity, his strength, his power, able to suffer not only for his country but also for the frontier and for the Indians, and for his girl, as he is a noble savage against the savage Indians. The close up on his face shows his pain. The pain he suffers because he has to kill Indians to protect the settlers and vice-versa.

The other significant and surprising sequence in the film is the rendering of opposing forces in the last sequence. Even though Hawkeye is considered the pathfinder – the hero – the center of the story, he assumes his white identity and leaves the wilderness behind. He joins the Army, shakes hands with Heyward and says: “After all, we are fighting for the same cause” (1936 filmic version). There must be two explanations for this end: according to Barker and Sabin they are both fighting “to make America safe for God-fearing white folk. In the context of the world political situation in the mid-1930s, the subliminal message is clear. Whether the threat is communism or National Socialism, the two leading capitalist nations must stand together” (92). As pointed out previously, since director Dunne was involved in political matters and as “he was subject to witch hunts and blacklists in the 1940s and 50s”, the audience should not be surprised to find resonances of the battles in his version.

The 1992 Michael Mann’s filmic version

Michael Mann’s filmic version, is still different from Seitz’s, even though Mann based his version on Seitz’s.

The story has the same beginning – The Munro sisters and Major Heyward are escorted by Indian Magua to the Fort. They are rescued by Nathaniel, Hawkeye in Seitz’s version, Uncas and Chingachgook. Nathaniel and Duncan fall in love with Cora and Uncas with Alice. After the surrender, there is a massacre in the wilderness. At the Indian’s tribe Heyward offers himself for the girls. Cora leaves with Nathaniel and Magua leaves with Alice. When Heyward is burning in fire, Nathaniel shoots him in order to prevent his suffering. Uncas tries to save Alice and is killed by Magua and Alice jumps herself to her death after Uncas. Chingachgook kills Magua. At the end Chingachgook, Nathaniel and Cora are together at the top of a mountain praying for Uncas.

The wilderness in this version is respected by Nathaniel Poe – the hero – and his Indian friends. It is interesting to mention that the film starts with a pray after the hunting of a deer in the wilderness. And the film ends, after Uncas's death, with Chingachgook, Nathaniel and his girlfriend, at the top of a mountain, in a superior position, praying for Uncas. Throughout the film the characters show respect for the place, and for the food they get from the place at the very beginning, in contrast with the wilderness which will be populated by a new civilization after the extinction of a race of Native-Americans. This becomes clear at the very end of the film through the dialogue between Chingachgook and Hawkeye:

Chingachgook: "The frontier moves with the sun and pushes the red man of the wilderness forests in front of it. Until one day there will be nowhere left. Then our race will no more, or be not us. The frontier place is for people like my white son and his woman and their children."

Nathaniel: "That's my father's sadness talking."

Chingachgook: "No. It is true. One day, there will be no more frontier. The men like you will go, too. Like the Mohicans. And new people will come. Work. Struggle to make their light. One mystery remains."

Nathaniel: "What is that?"

Chingachgook: "Will there be anything left to show the world that we ever did exist?"

(1992 filmic version)

From the mountains where they are, they can see the precipice which took Alice's and Uncas's lives away, and this place makes them aware that they are being separated from their pasts and facing the coming of a new world. This proves that Cooper's frontier is a place where Nature, which includes the Native American will be slowly destroyed by progress of the white invaders. Characters such as Uncas and Chingachgook are doomed to extinction

by this progress. Uncas has already died, and we, as readers, are made aware, through this last dialogue in the film, of Chingachgook's tragic fate.

Before explaining the differences between the two filmic versions, it is necessary to make some comments of general and specific aspects of the mise-en-scene in order to investigate the ways in which Cooper's themes were adapted in both filmic versions.

Setting in a novel is the location and time in which the action takes place. In some cases the entire action of a novel is determined by the locale in which it is set, and in *The Last of the Mohicans*, the environment determined the characters. "It sometimes happens that the main locale of a novel assumes an importance in the reader's imagination comparable to that of the characters and yet somehow separable from them" (*Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*).

Cooper's setting is the American frontier, with its wilderness, virgin land, and its human conflicts. Cooper takes advantages of the abundant nature which is offered by mountains, caves, watercourses, springs, beaver ponds, thick forests, and waterfalls. These elements combined make up for a place of beauty but also, in Cooper's narrative, poses constant potential threat both from the natural conditions and the native Indians. Thus, on the one hand, from Chapter one to seventeen, the description of the journey to Fort William Henry and the events leading to the massacre, reveals a beautiful environment. On the other hand, from chapter eighteen to the end the course of Hawkeye and the Mohicans, as they track Magua and the Munro sisters, provides an important context for the tragic conclusion.

By describing the beautiful landscape [Glenn's Falls] in Chapter six, Hawkeye predicts symbolically what is going to happen at the end. He says:

If you had daylight, it would be worth the trouble to step up on the height of this rock, and look at the perversity of the water. It falls by no rule at all; sometimes it leaps, sometimes it tumbles; there, it skips; here, it shoots; in one place 'tis white as snow, and in another 'tis green as grass; hereabouts, it pitches into deep hollows, that rumble

and quake the 'arth; and thereaway, it ripples and sings like a brook, fashioning whirlpools and gulleys in the old stone, as it 'twas no harder than trodden clay. The whole smoothly, as if meaning to go down to descent as things were ordered; then it angles about and faces the shores; nor are there places wanting where it looks backward, as if unwilling to leave the wilderness, to mingle with the salt! Aye, lady, the fine cobweb-looking cloth you wear at your throat, is coarse, and like a fishnet, to little spots I can show you, where the river fabricates all sorts of images, as if, having broke loose from order, it would try its hand at everything. And yet what does is amount to! After the water has been suffered to have its will, for a time, like a headstrong man, it is gathered together by the hand that made it, and a few rods below you may see it all, flowing on steadily toward the sea, as was foreordained from the first foundation of the 'arth! (*LOTM* 63-64).

The description is full of antithesis: darkness, brings fear. Even if he is describing a beautiful place, the words used, such as perversity of water, it falls by no rule, leaps/tumbles, skip/shoot, pitches into deep hollows, that rumble and quake the earth until the end, suggest the ups and downs of life and something that can not be controlled. After the massacre scene [Chapter seventeen], Cooper describes, in Chapter eighteen, the landscape, which had been seen so lovely, is now pictures in a tragic way. Hawkeye says:

The whole landscape, which, seen by a favoring light, and in a genial temperature, had been found so lovely, appeared now like some pictured allegory of life, in which objects were arrayed in their harshest but truest colors, and without the relief of any shadowing. The solitary and arid blades of grass arouse the passing gusts fearfully perceptible; the bold and rocky mountains were too distinct in their barrenness, and the eye even sought relief, in vain, by attempting to pierce the illimitable void of heaven which was shut to its gaze by the dusky sheet of ragged and driving vapor. The wind blew unequally; sometimes sweeping heavily along the ground, seeming to whisper its moanings in the cold ears of the dead, then rising in a shrill and mournful whistling, it entered the forest with a rush that filled the air with the leaves and branches it scattered in its path. Amid the unnatural shower, a few hungry ravens struggled with the gale; but no sooner was the green ocean of woods which stretched beneath them passed, than they gladly stopped, at random, to their hideous banquet. In short, it was a scene of wildness and desolation; and it appeared as if all who had profanely entered it had been stricken, at a blow, by the relentless arm of death (*LOTM* 213-214).

The world of the novel changed, especially because the action takes place during the pre-revolution America, in 1757, when men were pushing the frontier westward. These men, though in close contact with nature, became brutes due to their need to possess, to win nature physically. Even though the novel does not reveal human nature as completely bad, most men

in the novel are directly or indirectly in conflict within them for the possession of the land. In a setting within which human nature is so eager to possess the land and to displace the native owners, which are the Indians, both Gamut and Hawkeye are doomed to failure: the former and the other characters who came from out of the wilderness are too narrow-minded to understand another culture well enough in order to readapt themselves; the latter must fail because it is obvious that in *The Last of the Mohicans* the frontier is a condition that will finally pass and will carry with it the man and all the virtues it had fostered. This is indicated clearly at the end when the Indians are slowly dispossessed of their land, of their sustenance, and existence, due to the victory of the White invaders. Thus, the setting is not only a matter of time and place (even if these are historical) but also a matter of atmosphere that encompasses, permeates, and unifies all the living elements of the novel, in this specific case, the atmosphere is of conquest and dispossession.

In the novel, Cooper emphasized different types of settings: the wilderness, Nature – mountains, falls, rivers, the frontier, the small town, the forts and the Indian tribes. Cooper also describes the setting as the place in which opposing forces come to play: wilderness and civilization.

In relation to the films, *mise-en-scene* is understood as all the elements which are found in front of the camera that can be controlled and chosen. The landscape is very important in a film to bring realism to it. Furthermore, the landscape can bring meaning to characters. However, in the 1936 black-and-white version the landscape, which is related to wilderness and the frontier, is not faithfully explored. The wilderness and the frontier are almost unexplored. In the novel, Cooper spends chapters and chapters describing rivers, falls, mountains, birds and every single element that belongs to Nature, whereas in the film, Nature and wilderness are only the Indians' habitat; wilderness is the means through which Magua starts the process of his revenge, by trying to lead the young ladies through the shortcut.

In the 1992, colored filmic version, Michael Mann presents some issues which can be seen as similar to Cooper's intention. Hawkeye is portrayed in harmony with Nature. The 1992 version of *The Last of the Mohicans* was set in the North Carolina mountains, and won an Oscar for sound effect and great praise for the performances of Daniel Day-Lewis as Hawkeye, Madeleine Stowe as Cora, and Wes Studi as Magua.¹ Three years later, Michael Mann earned even greater acclaim with *Heat*, and in 1999 with *The Insider*. With his film, *The Last of the Mohicans*, "Mann could be said to have entered virgin forest – the realm of the studio blockbuster, although, by current standards, this \$ 35 million colonial pic from Twentieth Century Fox is scarcely exorbitant" (Graham Fuller < <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Theater/5784/heat/3interview.html>>).

Due to bad facilities conditions, the technicians, the crew and part-players went on strike. Shooting the film was exhausting. Also due to the fact that the cast were relatively unknown, so no great star was present in the film to help Mann to sell it. "The film was a box-office hit, though it was not so clearly a critical success.

Some critics say that Mann was accurate in his accounts of the novel and some say he changed everything. I think in several aspects he was consistent in keeping the plot and setting with some changes and I do not totally agree when he says that "the project's attraction lies in making a passionate and vivid love story in a war zone" <<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Theater/5784/heat/3interview.html>>. He really made it, but when we watch the film we can notice that it is possible to relate many aspects of the film not only with love story. It is very important to note Mann's attempt at historical authenticity, when he looked for a place – North Carolina – which was to be the same portrayed in 1757. In order to be closer to the real Hawkeye, Daniel Day-Lewis spent a month in the forests of North Carolina learning how to survive in the 18th century wilderness and learning to use the proper weapons. Even though Mann makes clear that he wanted to

create an adventure, it is implicit that he wanted something else. His war on the frontier required guerrilla and trench tactics. This radical vision may be the reflection of the events that happened from the years Michael Mann got the rights to produce the film (1989) until the year it was on screen (1992). In 1988, for example, the Soviet Union broke down. In 1989, the Fall of the Berlin Walls took place. In 1990, Gorbachev wanted to change the form of the Soviet system. All of these and the Vietnam War that was never forgotten by Americans might have made Michael Mann introduce radical ideas about the war. Dunne's war is not so cruel as in Mann's. In Mann's version, the war is absolutely violent.

In the article "Making some Light: An Interview with Michael Mann," by Graham Fuller, Michael Mann explained that he never read Cooper's novel, however he used Dunne's version as a source, because he said:

It was a terrific piece of writing. Dunne did a very interesting thing. He was writing at a time of tremendous political struggle in the United States, a country caught in a depression and at the same time seeing events in Asia and Europe. The view here was isolationist, although some people with political agendas saw the need to take part in international struggles against the rising tide of fascism. Also, there was a heavy dose of anti-British sentiment among the isolationists, led by the Chicago Tribune. Dunne essentially gave Hawkeye the political attitudes of the isolationists: independent, anti-authoritarian... anti-British. But then at the end of the movie, in 1936, both men – Hawkeye the proto-American individualist, and Heyward – both in love with Cora, march off to war together to face a greater common enemy.

When the interviewer asks him "Are you trying to make any contemporary political statements yourself?" Michael Mann answered:

No. The project's attraction lies in making a passionate and vivid love story in a war zone. [...] The politics are functional to the story-telling, as is visual style. I didn't want to take 1757, this story, and turn it into some kind of two-dimensional metaphor for 1991. What I did want to do was go the other way and take our understanding of those cultures – and I think we understand them better today than Cooper did in 1826 – and use our contemporary perspective as a tool to construct a more intense experience of realistically complex people in a complex time.

One can notice that as the period in which Dunne lived influenced the way he wrote, Michael Mann, who used Dunne's work as a resource, let some events which happened in the 1990s influence his work.

Hats are another type of prop which identify different types of people and ethnical mixture since there are lots of types of hats explored in both films. The British, showing their superiority in relationship to North Americans, wear hats as if they were crowns. The hat used by Hawkeye in the 1936 version is similar to the one worn by Daniel Boone, who is a man of the wild, as opposed to the 1992 version. Nathaniel Poe in the 1992 version does not wear any type of hat.

Horses are also the means of transportation used to shorten distances. Even though the horses are killed by Hawkeye in the 1936 version, because Indians can feel the presence of horses for miles in the woods, they are very important. At the very beginning of the film, the trio enter the woods led by Magua riding horses. Cora and Alice are riding brown ones whereas Heyward is on a white one. Yet, when they depart they are powerful on their horses, in a few minutes they are attacked and the horses killed, as a premonition of their own fate.

The drums play a very meaningful role in the two versions. The sound of it can be related to the good or bad events in life. However, in Mann's version the presence and the absence of the sound of the drums are noticeable. When Colonel Munro surrenders and leaves the fort, the anticipatory silence, both of the drums and of the people, is very powerful and it brings a lot of tension to the action.

The Guns are another prop that calls attention, because they are constructed as the means to fight the enemy, as well as a form of protection. The gun used by Hawkeye is called "Le Long Carabine" symbolizes his masculinity, his power and his superiority in the woods in relation to other people. Even when Heyward dresses Hawkeye's clothes and goes to the Delaware camp, the Indian chief immediately recognizes that he is not the real Hawkeye,

because of the absence of the gun. Thus, guns, bows and arrows are weapons which belong to warriors, and all the characters in the film are, in one way or another, elements of the prop used for the action, to advance the plot. In the films these elements already present in the novel help to advance the conquest of the frontier.

Differences between the Novel and the two filmic versions:

The two filmic versions contain significant plot variations: The first difference is related to the role played by the two female characters:

In his novel, Cooper portrays the blonde female character, Cora, who belongs to a pure race, without mixture, as being rebellious, strong, and aggressive, as she represents the Eastern woman who is coming Westward to help the family to settle in the frontier. She represents the tough woman who has to work hard and face lots of difficulties in order to establish herself and the family in the new home. Alice is the brunette. She is portrayed by Cooper, as a very fragile woman, who suffers prejudice because she descends from a mixed race. She is the fruit of Colonel Munro's first marriage to a slave. Her father wants to marry her to Major Heyward, who wants to marry Cora. Munro even accuses him of prejudice, but Heyward defends himself explaining that he likes Cora, not because of her color, but because of herself.

Seitz, did not follow Cooper's tradition, and reversed the role of the two ladies. He chose the actress Binnie Barnes, as Alice, the brunette, and Heather Angels, as her name suggests, as Cora. Alice, then, plays the role of the tough woman who faces the difficulties with strength, helping to load the guns during the Indian attacks and in the Fort. She is always ready to help her sister, Cora.

One can conclude that Director George Seitz made the dark-haired actress play the toughest role, even though she was not black, but from a mixed race, as a criticism on a very painful issue: segregation – “that is, separating blacks from the rest of the community and refusing them many of the rights enjoyed by other people” (Bryn O’Callaghan 112). O’Callaghan also points out that “taking the road north or west promised an escape not just from poverty, but from miseries and humiliations of segregation which were a part of every southern black’s daily life” (112). To conclude, it is noticeable that Director Seitz chose Heather Angels for the role of the angelical-looking Alice because of her sweet way of talking and acting. On the other hand, I suppose Binnie Barnes, combines all the elements that characterize Alice as a strong, a sensual beauty, an intelligent look and the unconventional self-conscious attitude he needed to send her to the west in order to protect her from racial prejudice.

Natty Bumppo and his functioning within the plot

The other significant difference is related to the name of the scout used by Cooper and the film directors and how he functions in both films. Cooper’s scout is called Nathaniel Bumppo, the frontiersman, the pathfinder . He is a white tough Englishman, a legendary hero who lives in the wilderness which he has conquered mainly through his extremely strong physical and mental forces. His complexity resides in the fact that he was a white man raised among Indians, also a Puritan with no schooling, and who had honesty in his favor. In his complete honesty, he embodies the purest ideals of the white man who can see the facts from

an Indian perspective, but who also holds the Puritan ideals without being violated by the civilization. Being so, he is reduced to the purest level of the white human race. For that reason, it does not matter how well he gets along with the Indians, as we know that, in the end, he is still a good white man. A guide. The way the character of Natty Bumppo is described in the novel – as if his behavior helps to shape America, being alienated from his British background and so adapted to the land – should be seen as a symbolic transfer of power from one nation to the other. Natty is the British who is in total harmony with the land which will become America. He encompasses the British tradition with the Indian culture and transforms himself into the symbol of the New Nation (Barker and Sabin 27).

In the 1936 version, he is called Hawkeye, as he is good at shooting; in Mann's version he is Nathaniel Poe, a man who assumes his position as white man. Natty is not, until the 1936 film, when Randolph Scott played the role, a romantic character. Cooper's Hawkeye considers Chingachgook his brother and takes a paternal attitude toward Uncas. In both filmic versions, Hawkeye and Uncas are portrayed as brothers, Chingachgook as their father. This shift makes it easier for both filmmakers for his characterization as a sexually active Hawkeye. He does not fall in love with any of the women in the novel. If the filmmakers had kept Hawkeye's age, he would be too old to fall in love with a young girl like Alice in 1936 and Cora in 1992.

Love and heterogeneous subplots

Hawkeye and Nathaniel Poe in both filmic versions, are contemporary of Uncas and fall in love with Cora. Cora is attracted to Uncas in the novel, whereas as in both films Cora falls in love with Nathaniel and Uncas with Alice. Seitz's Cora is also dark-haired and this

inversion is not surprising, as he wants to emphasize the Hay's Office's horror of miscegenation.⁴ Mann's version wants to emphasize Nathaniel as a "man without a cross" and his white side against his Indian side, who now has a girlfriend to break his celibacy.

According to Hilary Radner in her article "Pretty is as Pretty does: Free Enterprise and the Marriage plot," she explains that in the 18th -Century novel, the traditional marriage or romance plot was about:

finding validation of one's uniqueness and importance by being singled out among all other women by a man. [...] In this system of representation, the woman's value was guaranteed, though not solely determined by, her virginity, referred to as her virtue, her chastity. Thus to be virtuous was represented by absence, the absence of sexual desire and sexual knowledge. In this context, sexual knowledge, and by extension knowledge in general, was the sign not of value but of 'damaged goods.' Crucial to this system of value was the ideal of two separate spheres, the public and the private" (57).

The symbolic importance of female chastity rapidly disappeared, when women started working out of home in the 1960s. Women were distinguished and their historical moment changed. They acquired their independence from the family, the right of making their own decisions rather than following the father's, they also won a Hollywood twist. In the 1980s and 1990s fifty percent of all women were working outside home and this new femininity brought the women to a public sphere. Again quoting Hilary Radner

This new femininity defines itself and its pleasures (its libidinal economy) on a marketplace in which her capital is constituted by her body and her sexual expertise, which she herself exchanges. She is not exchanged by men, but acts as her own agent – as a 'free' agent within a grid of relationships defined by office hierarchy and the 'deal.' Women's magazines, self-help books, women's novels, not to mention Lifetime television, are all eager to offer women a new paradigm for feminine behavior... [...] It is the new 'value' of the woman, determined through her mastery of the 'arts' of seduction, sexual gratification, and consumer display, that both demands a fundamental reworking of the marriage plot, and yet preserves the story as one in which eroticism and ambition are inevitably and inextricably linked, in which feminine ambition can only be realized through marriage to the right man (50-60).

In Cooper's novel Alice plays the primary female role and Cora plays the secondary. Mann reverses the role of the two women. In the 1992 filmic version, Cora is never weak.

Mann allows Cora to be corageous, rebellious, independent, and strong, especially when she refuses to back Duncan and accuses him of lying, she becomes immediately, the perfect partner for Nathaniel as she was not dependent on his protection. When Nathaniel and Cora are separated – he was captive and she was taken by Magua – she proves how fast she has learnt to be Nathaniel's woman , by leaving a trail to be followed by him.

In this way, within the classical marriage plot, while the novel follows the old tradition and keeps the women in the domestic sphere, the 1992 filmic version of *The Last of the Mohicans* suggests the influence of the new Hollywood narrative, brings Cora to the public sphere and allows her to marry and enter again in the world of the family, as she lost hers.

The other significant difference is in relationship to Heyward. In the novel he falls in love with Alice and he does not die, whereas in both films, he falls in love with Alice, and he dies in a Delaware camp shot by Nathaniel in Mann's version. Heyward does not understand that the methods of white warfare will not work in the wilderness. Even if sentimental, Heyward tries to be brave and active, especially when he knocks Hawkeye out, taking his clothes, and trying to be the hero who goes to the camp, to give himself in the place of Cora. However he shows lack of experience as he fails as a frontiersman.

Another important difference is related to Colonel Munro. Even if he lives in the novel, he symbolically dies in the wilderness in his return to civilization. In both films, Colonel Munro is killed by Magua, as a revenge, because he [Magua] was corrupted by white influences. Alcohol has corrupted him.

In the novel, Cora [the darker sister] dies killed by a Huron, whereas in both films she survives. In the 1936 version, she stays in America and in the 1992 version she travels with Nathaniel and Chingachgook. Alice (the blond sister) lives in Cooper's version and commits suicide in both versions. In the novel, Natty shoots and kills Magua; in both films, Chingachgook kills Magua, emphasizing the victory of the noble (savage) against the

corrupted one (evil). This change means that a modern vision of the Indians emphasize their ability to solve their own problems without the interference of the white man. The most important point in the novel is the portrayal of Natty as a lonely man. He is a hero in Cooper's novel (a frontiersman). His romanticism, in the novel, is based on his search for justice, whereas in both films, he is sexually arisen by the female characters. As mentioned by David Axeen in his article "Eastern Western" Hawkeye

a deerslayer became a manslayer. Natty would have preferred to confine his rifle virtuosity to the aesthetic pursuit of deer, but he is trapped in the clash between white and red cultures, and finally must kill to protect himself. [...] Natty insists that he is "a slayer, but no slaughterer." [He] is chaste despite temptations, and willingly risks everything to rescue [his] sworn companions from the fiendish tortures of natives resisting white invasion. [He] is also limited by [his] class status. Cooper allows Natty to criticize the social order being installed in the frontier, but denies him the love of women above his station. [...] Cooper wants to consider the people and forces really in control. [He] wants us to identify with [his] hero as natural aristocrats in still unspoiled wilderness domains (17).

In the 1936 version he plays the role of a marshal, who comes to separate the fighters and put order into the disorder. An important difference to mention is when Colonel Munro surrenders. The Huron attack takes place in the wilderness both in the novel and as in Mann's version. Yet, in the 1936 version the Hurons attack is in the Fort, and the French Army comes to help the British, while in 1992, there is no help from the French Army.

One can conclude that the Huron attack in the Fort can be read as a comparison to the true story, as the Indians' reward for participating in battles were the booty of enemy supplies, alcohol and weapons, as I mentioned before. On the other hand, Mann's version of the Huron attack in the wilderness could be read as a means to give more realism to the battle scene, becoming more brutal and less romantic.

Racial interchange and Hollywood

The burial of the dead people is also very meaningful. In Cooper's novel, Cora is buried by the whites and Uncas by the Indians, each one according to their traditions. In 1936, Uncas is provided with a burial platform and Alice is buried in a tomb according to the whites tradition, but the two races get together. In 1992, nothing is shown in relationship to the burial. The film gives the idea that Uncas and Alice were abandoned, a change that can be read as the abandoning of the cultural and romantic traditions.

The end of each version is also very important to characterize the plot. In the novel, as mentioned before, Hawkeye and Chingachgook go back alone to their natural place – the wilderness. In Seitz's version, Hawkeye leaves for Canada and abandons Alice and Mann, on the other hand, creates a young white man (Nathaniel) who is allowed to have a woman. His celibacy is broken and the problem of her miscegenation is solved.

Notes

¹ In relationship to the sound, tracks 1 to 9 were composed by Trevor Jones and tracks 10 to 15 were composed by Randy Edelman. They have two different styles: “the first half is astounding while the second half leaves you wondering what CD is playing. (Jay Tipnis. www.wam.umd.edu/~jtpnis/lastofmo.htm). Also according to Jay Tipnis “the difference between the two is easily discernable but understandable given the different situation between the two times we hear it. The first to represent Daniel Day-Lewis and Madeline Stowe falling in love, and the second time to provide a basis for much that love has grown as he chases after her” (Jay Tipnis. www.wam.umd.edu/~jtpnis/lastofmo.htm).

CONCLUSION

The vast and sparsely populated land provided the material for the dreams and plans of Americans through the nineteenth century. Large numbers of people came to the West to find land, build a house, live the opportunity to own a property and be successful. These dreams were linked to the mythology of open spaces and free land. However, to the Native Americans, this myth brought only disappointments. It resulted in the removal of the Native Americans from their homelands, and the destruction of their culture.

Literature played an important role in creating the Western myth, as the stories presented the means by which this myth determined the character of the Americans. *The Last of the Mohicans* was an instantaneous best-seller and put the author, James Fenimore Cooper as the first important American writer by defining his country in terms of wilderness, Indians and hero. Thus establishing Cooper as a “trailblazer” in creating the Western myth.

The main idea that remains after reading Cooper’s work *The Last of the Mohicans* is exactly what he states: nature is good; civilization is bad. So, consequently, men who are close to nature are noble, whether white or red; and men who represent civilized society are corrupted. Throughout his work, this idea is reinforced, most clearly by his choice of the characters, a white man, Hawkeye, raised on the margin of the constituted society of that time, an orphan raised by an Indian, Chingachgook the noble red man of the wilderness, well portrayed as the chief of a tribe on the edge of extinction.

Unlike Cooper’s straightforward view of Nature, Hawkeye’s views about the frontier are conflicting. He was a follower of President Andrew Jackson’s idea of democracy, a strand in American politics that enthusiastically embraced the “common man,” but only if he was white. Jackson, more than any other President, valued three things in the “American Dream”: (1) the

frontier, (2) homesteading for all and (3) the removal of native Americans from the “free land.” In fact, Jackson’s aim was the extinction of the wilderness. Cooper had antagonistic views in life regarding land and property, which he wrote about quite extensively. These works were frequently criticized by his contemporaries. In the novel, the quest for the frontier foregrounds two opposing ideas: the need to settle and to develop the country and the destruction caused by the settlers.

The frontier actually developed the country as we know it today: the moving towards the new land in the West, based on the belief that each man had the right to own land, no matter what the cost. In this case, the cost was the displacement of the original owners of the land, the native American Indians.

In that spirit, the frontier hero, is presented as a brave man with no family ties, and no real next of kin, like in Hawkeye’s case. His parents had been killed by savages. Hawkeye opens the way for his followers, with the very romantic notion that he is actually creating villages and settlements on the paths he opened himself, and which others followed on. Cooper portrays Hawkeye in positive absolute terms. But the mission he has leaves room for questions since the novel also portrays the destruction of the natives – an action motivated by the new settlers.

At the time period of the novel, the nation known as America was not yet constituted, as all the citizens of the country were subjects of the British Crown. But we can say that the America as we know it today, was shaped during that time, with the courage to pursue new places to establish towns, physically stretching the country all the way to the Pacific Coast. The frontier was and still is the romantic ideal of the American nation. Cooper’s hero is a loner, he has nothing more than his long gun, his faithful Indian companion, and yet, he opens the wilderness for his followers. As he stated his romantic view to Cora, nothing pleases him more than having others follow on his path, building cities along his trail, the one he opened for those who

followed. Very romantically, Cooper's work disregards mostly all the hard times faced by the settlers, who braved the hardships of crossing a country still to be and starting a new life in the West. The impression left is that his hero does it easily, leaving a bed of roses for the settlers, which only had to build the settlements and go to work on their farms. The romantic view of the frontier is closely tied to the romantic view of the pathfinder, the frontier hero. Now and then, the settlers were attacked by Indian tribes, their wives and daughters kidnapped by the savages, in which occasion the hero pathfinder would come to rescue them, fighting the Indians, saving the ladies and so redeeming himself of the status he usually had, of a low class with a noble mission. The contrasting views, about the frontier are best presented when Cooper foregrounds the devastation caused by the process of civilization: the Mohicans and nature are in danger of disappearing.

Turner's view of the frontier could well define a cycle, over and over again, as each new frontier is reached, another one springs up, thus creating the need to go for that one too, and this has pretty much been the history of the development of America. As each new frontier area, mainly the West is reached, the whole process recurs, which takes him to assert that development is strongly a return to primitive conditions, to the rediscovery of new places, new options, new things, not necessarily the wilderness, to be conquered. In that line, the quest to reach the Pacific Coast was not the big driving force behind the push towards the West, but the Great West itself the final purpose in the move forward the new frontier. In this way, the West was the constructive force, highly significant in the development of the country. In his view, little or no romanticism can be identified. The West becomes the myth as the goal to be reached.

Slotkin, follows on more or less the same line, stating that myths end up conditioning the lives of people, since they are affected by the past and the tradition carried on by or with one's

own myths. Slotkin, like Turner, sees the social and environmental hardships faced on the frontier as formative agents in the American outlook. The national character is shaped greatly by the myth narratives, told over and over and carried from generation to generation. Similarly, Henry Nash Smith considers the frontier a myth that helped to shape the character of America. Pride plays a big part in that shaping. Smith's arguments rely on Frederick Turner's earlier work. Both scholars rely on a relative absence of violence in America's westward expansion; even though both would obviously be aware of the wars. The imagery that Smith examines is free of violence; it is a tamed nature to be explored by Daniel Boone and settled by adventurous immigrants. The question about the validity of such a myth to Smith is irrelevant, since this myth is one of progress, cultivating the expanses of virgin soil and pushing civilization westward. In this way, the great myth, after all, is the frontier, which is the very birth and evolution of America as it came to be known. Narratives of great adventures were written about opening up this path towards the Pacific Coast, helping to create the myth. *The Last of the Mohicans* being one of the first. A myth that takes little consideration of the fact that many tribes kept good relationships with the white settlers and insists on presenting all Indians as savages, uncivilized, thus unworthy of keeping the land. A great and much needed excuse to displace them from the land that belonged to them in the first place. The three authors studied share similar points of view regarding the frontier. Figures like Daniel Boone or Natty Bumppo were exemplars of "Americanness." They play the role of paving the trail for civilization, preparing the West for Eastern influence. According to Slotkin, they are "the man who knows Indians" they are as natural as the savages, but they contribute to destroy them [the Indians]. In sum, according to Barker and Sabin "Hawkeye in *The Last of the Mohicans* is a living myth of private property. He inherits as its end, through his relation to Chingachgook, the once-perfect relation of the good Indian to the land" (194). Also, for Cooper, wilderness as stated by Barker and Sabin

was not itself a source of rights, but an estate where those attuned to it could and would demonstrate their higher humanity. Not just anyone could walk into primeval forest and become ennobled. Only those in tune with, and with a calling to, ennoblement could do so – and thus, the preternatural importance of the myth itself. [...] In support of what we are arguing consider the following (1) Cooper publishes *The Last of the Mohicans*, to become the best remembered of his five Leatherstocking Tales. In it, a noble man “inherits” all the fine qualities of the Indian, through his association with the last of the ur-Tribe. (2) But that tribe never disappeared. The Mohicans [...] lived on, [...] sought to live with and alongside with settlers, including fighting on the American side in the War of Independence, only to find their land gradually stripped from them through political machinations and legal maneuvers [...] (194-195).

These two examples illustrate the relations of myth to politics in Cooper’s writings.

As again pointed out by Barker and Sabin, Hawkeye “embodied in the nobility of the ‘man of the wilderness.’ Only such a man as he can contain and symbolize the virtues that turn property from ownership into the embodiment of natural virtue” (195).

Thus, in viewing the *Last of the Mohicans* as the “trailblazer” of the many great adventure novels about the taming of the Western Frontier, we can indeed conclude that its concept became deeply ingrained in the Nineteenth Century American Mythology of the Western Frontier.

We must examine how all this has been portrayed in the two filmic versions of Cooper’s novel, the 1936 and the 1992 versions. We must consider the opinion of several great historians about the frontier, as well as the importance of Cooper’s life and his works relating to the formation of the frontier myth and how this myth has been portrayed in the two filmic versions under analysis, in this work. It is now time to add up the significance of the story itself, its ability to survive much reworking and each time becoming more and more interesting, and still worth retelling.

Over generations, Americans have told stories to explain who they are. Images of these stories are repeated over and over and, are explained in political speeches and pictured in art. These images become symbols for cultural traditions. Nowhere is the American frontier truer

than in American culture. Pictures of cabins in the wilderness, a wagon on the trail, cattle ranchers, Indians disappearing into a dry landscape, and the struggle between Indians and settlers go back and forth in stories and in films.

The two filmic versions are not faithful reproductions of the novel, instead they are loose adaptations. Their success depended on Seitz's and Mann's abilities to bring to the screen the novel's underlying theme. Even though Seitz's approach differs from the original novel and Mann's approach is still different from Seitz's, they keep the central character – Hawkeye – as the myth of the frontier. Nature is tamed and controlled by Hawkeye. And one can argue that the character functions as a key element to foster this American myth.

In contrast to Seitz's, Michael Mann's version, even if much more savage and brutal than Seitz's, is more romanticized than the previous one. At the end, Hawkeye, the hero, stands on the top of the mountain, on a very superior position, with the last survivor of the tribe who raised him, waiting for civilization to follow on his path, as he speaks in the name of a class.

Both versions of *The Last of the Mohicans* were well accepted by the audience, because they were transformed by skillful writers and film directors. Even though Seitz's black and white film did not picture wilderness and nature as Cooper did in his novel, the way he manipulated the camera and made use of detailed mise-en-scene ensured the quality of the film. Although Mann's version has some historical validity, *The Last of the Mohicans* is an adventure film. Through the close-ups he brought from the text to the screen, the characters' psychological motivations and the environmental forces that pressed upon them were shown. The films combine sound and image and transport them into a world of action, excitement and danger in a poetic way, that is close to Cooper's emphasis on the frontier theme. In both films the frontier is a present issue underlying two poles: authenticity versus romanticism. As Production Designer of the 1992 version, Phil Schmidt stated

To bring the world of Hawkeye to life, the producers have assembled an extraordinary team of designers, historians, and craftspeople. While we're recreating life in the 1750s for the series, we're keeping in mind that James Fenimore Cooper wrote his novel nearly 100 years later, [...] Cooper, as well as the Hudson River Valley school of painters in the mid-1800s, had a romanticized vision of life on the frontier before the American Revolution. In reality, life during the French and Indian Wars was difficult, dirty and dark, symbolizing the spirit of the 1700s and the heroism of the frontiersmen who helped forge a new nation. We're going to great lengths to create sets, costumes and props authentic to have a gorgeous rich look in keeping the heroic vision of Cooper and the other artists of his time (Barker and Sabin 144).

Even though Cooper's narrative was deeply ingrained in the Nineteenth Century American mythology of the Western frontier, Hollywood changed Cooper some themes, kept Hawkeye as the central character of the romantic adventure and in 1992 placed him playing the main role in a love story.

Cooper introduced two heroines in his story. Hollywood took advantage of his creation, inverted the roles of them in 1936, killed the blonde – the strongest in Cooper's view – and made the dark-haired – Cora, the ideal partner for Hawkeye. He does not stay with her in the 1936 version, but he marries her in the 1992 version. Hollywood also takes advantage of the cultural and historical moment to create a new version of a story. In the case of *The Last of the Mohicans*, Hollywood rewrote Cooper's plot, made the language more modern, did not understand the theme, but gave a great importance to the popular taste. Thus we can conclude that these filmic versions were indeed loose adaptations of the novel. The changes of the concept – its focus, theme, plots and concerns -, were related to and due to the taste and the culture of the time period in which they were produced.

FILMOGRAPHY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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