

# A Post-Colonial Study of Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohican*: Relativity, Racism, Hybridity, and American Dream

Hajiali Sepahvand<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English Department, Faculty of Arts, Khorramabad Branch, Azad University, Khorramabad, Iran

Correspondence: Hajiali Sepahvand, English Department, Faculty of Arts, Khorramabad Branch, Azad University, Khorramabad, Iran. E-mail: Hajis106@gmail.com

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## Abstract

The study tries to explore some post-colonial themes in J. Fenimore Cooper's *Last of Mohican*. For doing so, it traces the elements including: relativity, racism, hybridity, and American Dream by which Cooper abrogates legitimized superiority of Europe and inferiority of American, although he has appropriated European English and changed it for American local needs. In fact, he reveals the post-colonial condition of America to define Americanism, American identity, hero, and myth in his novel. In actuality, the real concern of a colonized person, like Cooper, is to object to colonizers; therefore, we investigate his novel which was shaped in the transitional period of colonization to their independence as the reflection of internal voice of a nation against invaders. The article came to the conclusion that Cooper, by his novel, serves to introduce American autonomous novel and literature which is the greatest manifestation of culture. That is, he tries to announce American cultural independence through literature, namely decolonization.

**Keywords:** abrogation, appropriation, relativity, racism, hybridity, American dream, post-colonial study

## 1. Introduction

Decolonization, resistance against colonizers, is the concern of colonized nations. In other words, the invaded people suffer from their inferiority and seek an alternative. This social temptation is meditated and speculated by thinkers, philosophers, and great social reformists. Among them poets and scholars try to defend their nations; therefore, they perceive the spirit of their own time and start to narrate it in an attractive and influential way. Purposely, Charles Brockden Brown, precursor of autonomous American romantic novel, J. Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, and Beecher Stowe were American Romantic novelist and **the radical decolonizer**. They were going to fight against the imported European, especially British, literary standards and establish an American original novel. Interestingly, in their works, decolonization is not a simply rejection and challenging the superiority and authenticity of European standards but it is abrogating and undermining these standards through changing English into American english to use it for local needs and their own conventions. In other words, it declares their own autonomous literary standards regardless European expectations and conventions and introduces and explains its principle through American english which is real demarginalization. It occurs because colonized Americans, after Agency, assume Europeans standards as local man-made conventions imposed through their language as superior and standard. Therefore, they appropriated language and constructed their own world. Emerson's struggle for defining poetry is the real embodiment of this demarginalization. Notwithstanding the importance of romantic novelist in American decolonization, reflection of Americanization, American localities, and proposed themes including American Edenic possibilities, American Myth and Dream, American Hero, Hybridity and Dialectic clashes, determines their status whether they are decolonizer or not. Cooper is the decolonizer who tries to reflect Americanization or American locality (decolonization).

## 2. Discussion

Drawing plan of American Myth which is one of the cornerstones of national and cultural identity of each nation like America, Cooper idealizes and mythicizes Hawkeye as the American heroism dream and design the plot and setting of the novel as the land which is the dreamy melting pot; therefore, *The Last of The Mohican* is American Myth like Homers *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Chaucers *conterbarary tales*, Spenssers *Fairy Queen*, Ferdusie's *King Book*,....The melting pot or America as the highest capacity (the Myth of America) can be traced in the novel through analysis of motif of relativity, Hawkeye's heroism and adaptability, hybridity, the rightness of racial gifts,

and interracial friendship.

Hawkeye puts forward differences between currents and tides, and the large salt ocean and the smaller fresh lakes in consideration of the mystery of tides. Hawkeye concludes that everything depends on what scale you look at things. Now, on the small scale, the earth is level; but on the large scale it is round (Cooper, 1826, p. 23). Proposing “honest man” and the last sentences, Cooper consciously declares relativity which is the essence of the uncertainty in the views of postmodernist philosophers as “Lyotard, ... similar to Derrida, conceives truth to be “local” (Ashcroft, 2004, p. 164) and, consequently, post-colonial localization of the reality and truth by Allen Curnow from New Zealandian who says post-colonial “reality must be local and special at the point where we pick up the traces (Curnow, 1960, p. 25)” or, as the Australian critic Vance Palmer put it openly: “Our art must be original as our own flora and fauna are original (Palmer, 1969, p. 169).” Additionally, Hawkeye reveals justice, relativity... in the scene in which he confesses Gamut’s “strange calling” as his “gift” and must not be denied (Cooper, 1826, p. 49); actually, this is nothing but the Melting Pot.

Hawkeye, being the first great fictional embodiment of the American myth, unlike the other characters, proves himself through **exceptional deeds as adaptability and mental hybridity**. That is, American Adam, the mythic New World hero whom R. W. B. Lewis describes in *The American Adam* as: “a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources (Lewis, 1908, p. 5).” He, in fact, adapts to different characters and the difficulties of the frontier and bridges the divide between white and Indian cultures. Thus, James Fenimore Cooper introduces Natty Bumppo or Hawkeye whose moral purity and social innocence posit him as overt version of Adam before the Fall. This central self-made figure of Leatherstocking saga is the child of wilderness, “has no kin” (Cooper, 1826, p. 315) and far away from corrupting influences of civilization and from temptations of Eve through avoiding marriage. In other words, the hero of all five Leather stocking tales, Bumppo is well known as “the archetypal westerner whose legend is the essential myth of American (Leslie, 1969, p. 118).”

To achieve an adequate adaptation, Hawkeye chooses Chingachgook and Uncas, who are the Mohicans, as his closest friends. In other words, he selects the positive elements of his white race and Indian social and practical culture. Thus he establishes adaptability as the best criteria in such a new world and he is mythicized and idealized by Cooper because the myths serious purpose in Rosenberg view is “... to instruct members of the community in the attitudes and behavior necessary to function successfully in that particular culture (hero myth and epics) (Rosenberg, 1986, p. xvi).” That is Hawkeye whose particular attitudes and behaviors are Cooper’s purposely establishment of the prototype ideal American individual and violation of all selfish European individuals. In other words, Hawkeye is both a character and a symbol. Cooper uses him to symbolize the myth of the hero woodsman. Hawkeye’s heroism is observed in respecting the nature, that is, Indian’s sympathy for nature (American Hero) when he complains: “old age is a great injury to good looks, as these sweet young ladies have yet to I’arn! The place is sadly changed! These rocks are full of cracks... (Cooper, 1826, p. 46)”. Moreover, his wide reputation as a rifleman, his physical heroism, has given him the additional moniker of La Longue Carabine which is proved through his heroic actions of demonstrating perfect marksmanship in the shooting contest which was held by the Delawares (Cooper, 1826, p. 269).

Hybrid is another theme confirming the novel as post-colonial as well as an instrument by which the colonized scholar as Cooper disrupts and undermines the monolithic culture of the center or metropolis. Agency, as remedy of self-assertion, is the moment in which a colonized nation tries its self-expression. Additionally, it is one of the primary steps in self-apprehension which violates exclusivity of the centre. Among post-colonial concepts, hybridity is the condition in which agency and self-apprehension is inevitable because purity of monolithic culture of Imperialism is abrogated. In actuality, a hybrid person neither belongs to the centre culture nor to the colonized one. As a natural process of colonization, colonized nation produces a hybrid culture while keeping both colonizer and colonized cultures. This is inevitable. It is because of social interaction between colonizers and colonized. Imitation of colonizer culture, in one sense, is for coexistence. In other sense, it is to achieve the position of colonizer which is superior to colonized position.

Homi k. Bhabha is the critic who seriously and intelligently recognized a space belonging to hybrid. In fact, he, unlike other critics, argues there are three spaces. The first one belongs to the imperialism, the second one to the colonized and the Third Space, according to Bhabha, belongs to the hybrid:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory... may open the way to conceptualizing an *international*

culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the "inter"- the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space- that carries the burden and meaning of culture (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38).

For Bhabha, multiculturalism or diversity of culture does not fall into this class. By the Third Space, he means hybrid position in the relationship between Imperialism/colonized which makes "envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the "people" possible and through exploring it we "may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the other of ourselves." This hybridity is resulted in the inevitable anxiety of Imperialism authority because Imperialism encounter an ambivalence situation whether to put this kind in his class or others. Inevitably it carries a destructive anxiety.

To define the Myth of America, Cooper centralizes plot of his novel on hybridity-as one of them- to abrogate any monolithic culture and exclusivity. In other words, through the "vexed concepts of ambivalence and hybridity [Cooper] avoids binary formulations of difference (Ashcroft et al., 2004, p. 206)."

In the novel there are some hybridities as: Hawkeye, Cora, Cora and Uncas' love, Cora's father and mother marriage, and the secret cavern (wilderness) as the secure place of the hybridity.

In other words, hybridity is a central concept and theme of the novel by which explorations of family and race becomes possible. Hybridity, in fact, is the combination of different elements into one whole. The novel is replete with hybridity. It is observed in intersection of nature and culture or different races. Interestingly, Cooper sees cultural diversity and hybridity as ultimately desirable; although he is uncertain and ambivalent about his contemporary society. Evidently, he explores cultural clashes between the settler colonizers and Native American and creates characters who appropriate the best elements of both cultures. John Mohegan, for example, is portrayed in *The Pioneers* as a hybrid character and he appears in *The Last of the Mohican* as Chingachook the father of Uncas. He is a respectful, harmless and religious man who coexists with the whites. Chingachook is the experienced Indian whom Cooper introduces in *The Pioneers* so: "from his long association with the white-men, the habits of Mohegan, were a mixture of the civilized and the savage states, and his dress was a mixture of his native and European fashions (Cooper, 1988, pp. 85-6)."

Actually one of the most implicit symbols of Mohegan's hybridity is his name: John Mohegan is an oddly mixed name. John is an English and Christian name and Mohegan is an Indian name. Also he is wearing the model of George Washington which indicates his good terms with European-American thoughts and ideals. This agreement is confirm in confrontation to Judge Temple-representative of the white authorities-who shakes Mohegan's hand and says "Thou art Welcome, John (Cooper, 1988, p. 87)."

Hawkeye, also, is symbol of a hybridity as product of colonialism. He carries components of both European and Indian cultures. Actually, he is a cultural synthesis and an ideal spiritual hybrid character who can initiate and facilitate cultural hybridity between the colonizer and colonized, namely The Third Space which undermines absolute purity of dominant culture.

Hawkeye who is white by blood and Indian in practice is a hybrid as he puts: "I am the man, however, that got the name of Nathaniel from my kin; the compliment of Hawkeye from the Delawars, ... whom the Iroquois have presumed to style the 'Long Rifle' (Cooper, 1826, p. 267)." A part of his (Hawkeye) success is because of his capability of borrowing elements of both civilization and savagery. In other words, Hawkeye is a hybrid white figure who carries Indian's traits in confrontation to nature and a white man whose concern is to introduce his own culture (Cooper, 1826, p. 46).

Regarding his physical appearance, Bumpo's (Hawkeye) racial origin is ambiguous. In *The Pioneers*, he is wearing a coat with Indian ornament; moreover, he is described in *The Last of the Mohican* as "one whose skin is neither red nor pale (Cooper, 1826, p. 262). In the case of practical daily behaviors, Bumpo reveals characteristics of both cultures. He knows Indian language, their hunting, fishing and fighting. Thus Bumpo serves as a cultural mediator and Cooper depicts him as a character carrying traits of both native Indian and white. This attempt is taken into account as a big step in planning American myth or melting pot which is dawn of a national awareness and consciousness about racial and cultural discriminations, differences and diversity. As we see, Cooper expresses these cultural differences through Natty Bumpo when he argues "The white man has his difficulties in getting redskin habits, quite as much as the Indian in getting white skin ways (Cooper, 1964, p. 27)."

Cooper, through Hawkeye, tries to question the idea that essential differences separate the two cultures which is like what has been discussed by Ashcroft et al. as: ... the strength of post-colonial theory may well lie in its

inherently comparative methodology and the hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies. This view provides a framework of “difference on equal terms” within which multi-cultural theories, both within and between societies, may continue to be fruitfully explored (Ashcroft et al., 2004, p. 35).” This difference on equal terms is the alternative for “destructive cultural encounter.” For Cooper, hybridity is inevitable in his future generation. Interestingly, the nineteenth century was the witness of a controversial debate on culture and scientific meanings. Consequently, the century’s greatest outcome was developments in genetics and popularity of the term “hybridity.” Even in our contemporary times, following Cooper’s concern, cross-culturality and multi-culture are the eminent embodiment of disabling monolithic culture as the last solution for inevitably social and cultural challenges and struggle of human for a peaceful coexistence: “both literary theorists and cultural historians are beginning to recognize cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group “purity”, and as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilized. In the same way the poles of governor–governed, ruler–ruled, etc. are inverted and the concept of dominance as the principal regulator of human societies is recognized but challenged (Ashcroft et al., 2004, p. 35).”

Also, Cora is the child of a black mother and white father; so, she is a hybrid (1826, p. 141).

As a human whose subjectivity and identity had been constructed by eighteenth-century rationalism (especially Scottish), that is, Foucauldian discourse, Cooper believed in a hierarchical classification of society in which everything has its own place. This belief, through the argument between Hawkeye and **Chingachgook**, is expressed by Hawkeye who insists on the “rightness of both Indian and white gifts.” Thus, the **realistic and rational view of race** is established. Complaining the invasion of wilderness by European, Chingachgook, the noble Mohican woodsman and long-life friend of Hawkeye, says “We worshiped Great Spirit ... The Dutch landed, and gave my people the fire-water: they drank until the heavens and earth seemed to meet and they foolishly thought they had found the Great Spirit” ... (Cooper, 1826, p. 24). In such a situation that is Hawkeye, unlike the European invaders, who can respect this Mohican without regard to his race but for his value as an individual and this is the indication of his own high capacity and understanding: there is reason in an Indian, though nature has made him with a red skin” ... (Cooper, 1826, p. 22) “the heaven of a red-skin and of us whites will be of one and the same (Cooper, 1826, p. 171).” For Hawkeye, “all good and evil gifts are bestowed (Cooper, 1826, p. 22).” Thus he concludes that natural talents as whiteness cannot be the instrument by which we impose our opinions on the others and justify our invasion and superiority. Instead, we should use them for more understanding different potential gifts of different races or establishment of, in Ashcroft’s terms, “a framework of difference on equal terms” within which multi-cultural theories, both within and between societies, may continue to be fruitfully explored (Ashcroft et al., 2004, p. 35).” In other words, he establishes the new discourse of America as the melting pot in which an “unmixed man” like Chingachgook who comes from the place” over great plains where the Boffaloes live (Cooper, 1826, p. 24)” can be in a normal, peaceful and secure term with ideal America which is embodied in Hawkeye whose “coming from red sky of the morning” is the metaphor for emergence of America and the ‘setting’ as a metaphor for decline of monodimensional and narrow-minded Indian. Such a melting pot and Americanhood become more perfect the moment in which Gamut’s colt is killed by Mohicans. In agitation and heartily regret for his colt, Gamut expresses his profoundly pity. In reaction to this condition, Hawkeye, as an open-minded man who understand fully, respects his sorrow and says that “it’s a good sign to see a man account upon his dumb friends (Cooper, 1826, p. 24).” This is the highest rational achievement of man which is established by Cooper as abrogating and undermining European normality and their false and man-made logic as the best universal one.

Love between Cora, a white woman, and Uncas, an Indian, is used by Cooper to value interracial friendship between men. Uncas crosses the borders of race differences and moves into the taboo world of interracial relationships. In fact, he transcends limitations of Hawkeye friendships, namely male-friendship between two races. According to the novel, Uncas is killed (Cooper, 1826, p. 304) because of his taboo violation. Whether Cooper believes in his punishment or in Uncas’s close-minded society, is quite ambiguous. In other words, this situation betrays the novel ambivalence.

Regarding this problem, Cooper goes further and puts forward possibility or non-possibility of interracial mixture and ignorance of skin, race and color at the present time through a dialogue between Munro and Hawkeye. Munro asks Hawkeye to wish to the Indians two hopes: “the Being we all worship, under different names, will be mindfull of their charity; and the time shall not be distant when we may assemble around His throne without destiction of sex, or rank, or colour (Cooper, 1826, p. 313).” Likewise, Cooper, in the end of *The Deerslayer*, describes Natty and Chingachgook as “constant” friends. This is the plot of American Dream which overlaps Fredric I. Carpenter’s description of America as manifestation of archetypal Utopia:

Earlier versions had placed it in Eden or in Heaven, in Atlantis or Utopia; but always in some country of imagination. Then the discovery of the new world gave substance to the old myth, and suggested the realization of it on actual earth. America became “the place” where the religious prophecies of Isaiah and the Republican ideals of Plato might be realized (Carpenter, 1955, p. 5).

Hawkeye, however, argues that these wishes are abnormal because of close-minded society. Therefore the society, in which race and skin color are irrelevant, (that is, coming future dream land of America)” is Cooper’s alternative which is expressed implicitly but not for the present time. He explicitly depicts this dream land in final page of the novel in which Chingachgook is mourning the death of his son, Uncas, because of interracial sexual relation and says:

“I am alone\_” but Hawkeye cries “no, no”,... “no sagamore, not alone. The gift of our color may be different, but God has so placed us as to journey in same path. He was your son, and a red-skin by nature; and it may be that your blood was nearest-but, if ever I forget tha lad who has so often fou’t at may 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. ... these two sturday and intrepid woodsmen bowed their heads together, will scalding tears fell to their feet, watering the grave of Uncas like drops of falling rain (Cooper, 1826, p. 315).”

Thus, although Hawkeye, perceiving the narrow-minded society, believes in inappropriateness of interracial sexual desire, his alternative for present time is the friendship and unity of the races and colors- Hawkeye and Chingachgood- in wilderness. As an alternative for future, he depicts Hawkeye and Chingachgook who are watering the grave of Uncas which is symbolically watering his deeds and interracial unity-transcending race- as the favorite of the future coming melting pot, dream land, and open-minded society, that is, America! In other words, Uncas spirit is watered by the tears of his real father Chingachgood and his symbolic father Hawkeye as the trained spirit which was fed by different colors and races; therefore, it transcends color and race as the self-reliance American who is quite different. Hawkeye, by his contradictory opinions, reveals ambivalence of his society about race in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These racist issues by cooper through Hawkeye, forecasts the cultural clashes about race in the United States as the only existing place in which such a problem can be discussed, analyzed and solved. This view is actually a kind of undermining Europe as metropolis which is lack of such a capacity and notwithstanding its apparently improvement, both scientifically and logically, yet there are unsolved problems such as race!

As a small but safe island in the heart of the wilderness, there is a secret cavern to which Cora and Uncas, while falling in love, are guided as a safe place for them (Cooper, 1826, p. 44), is another symbol by which Cooper implicitly establishes America myth. The secret cavern symbolizes the secret interracial attraction the couple feels for one another. Their attraction, like the cavern, provides a comforting haven for Cora and Uncas. The threatening dangers of the forest are symbols of external cultural dogma that forbids such a love, namely Indian and white. There is a symbolic comparison here. In other words, if the external community uncovers such a cavern, the group would face a bloody and murderous danger. It symbolizes that love between Uncas and Cora would be too abnormal and unnatural, namely a taboo violation. Such a love is only possible in the wilderness (cavern) which is symbol of America, a Melting Pot, and a dream land of Interracial and a raceless Land.

Also the secret safe island puts forward the possible cooperation between whites and Indians. That is, Cooper forecast such a future. According to Chapter VI the Mohicans governs the forest. In fact, they can steer it in safe because they know the secret island of cavern as the only place to save Indians and white. Notwithstanding the fact that Indian information about the forest is considerable; presence of Hawkeye is necessary to help them. While going to the Carven that is Hawkeye who holds the lit branch that leads the way to safety. He “was seated the scout, holding a blazing knot of pine (Cooper, 1826, p. 44).” This Hawkeye fire symbolizes the collaborative friendship between the Mohicans and the white man. The fire has no value without the knowledge of the Mohicans as Uncas who ‘stood at a little distance in advance (Cooper, 1826, p. 44),” that is, ahead of Hawkeye in the wilderness. By his fire, Hawkeye lights the way to the Carven.

### 3. Conclusion

Cooper seriously involves in the Imperialism project. He tries to establish American autonomous novel and character. In fact, he depicts the American local themes to reveal the post-colonial condition of America. The focal point is that he purposely introduces Hawkeye as American Adam or the hero of new mythic world. This hero has no kin and far away from corrupting influences of civilization and temptations of Eve through avoiding marriage. His behaviors are combination of Indian (noble savage) and white. Therefore, he transcends racial discrimination. In short, he is a hybrid or symbol of interracial community. By proposing relativism, he violates

absolute and exclusivity of Europe. In the death of Uncas, Hawkeye introduces himself as spiritual father of Uncas (noble savage) and close friend of Chingachgook (Uncas father). By violation of racial discrimination, hybridity, relativism..., Cooper establishes the Myth of America as the land for future Utopia in which the entire races and colors will coexist. Notwithstanding these optimistic views, Cooper, by punishment of Uncas, betrays his ambivalence and anxiety toward interracial (marriage of Indian and White) because of the contemporary narrow-minded society, although he sees a future in which it will be accepted.

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