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Whereas James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo and many of his "good" Indians have long received critical attention, comparatively little interest has been shown his so-called "bad" Indians. To date no critical essay or chapter of a book has been devoted to them, in spite of their prominent roles in his Indian novels. This study focuses on three of these characters: Magua of The Last of the Mohicans, Mahtoree of The Prairie, and Wyandotté, a leading character in the novel of that title.

Generally critics have lumped Magua, Mahtoree and Wyandotté together as if they were all of a kind. Careful study shows, however, that they are three quite different Indians. Their creation reflects both Cooper's continuing effort to come to terms with what he thought about the moral worth of the Indian and his effort to decide upon the right solution to the problem of Indian-white relations. With the creation of Magua, Cooper condemns the intrusion of the white man and suggests that the wilderness should be left to the Indian. With the creation of Mahtoree, he insists that the Indian share in the responsibility for a workable relationship and accept some responsibility for his own evil. At this point the two worlds are distinctly separate, but with the creation of Wyandotté, an effort is made to fuse the world of the Indian and the civilization

of the white man. From Magua to Mahtoree to Wyandotté the Indian gains considerably in stature as a human being.

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S "BAD" INDIANS: A STUDY OF MAGUA, MAHTOREE AND WYANDOTTÉ

by

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INTRODUCTION

Whereas Natty Bumppo and many of Cooper's "good" Indians have long received the critical attention they deserve, little attention has been given that other character type who frequently plays an important role in his fiction, the so-called "bad" Indian. To date no critical essay or chapter of a book has been devoted to him. This study is undertaken in the belief that a thorough exploration of at least the most prominent of these characters is essential to critical evaluation of a writer whose "conception of the American Indian," according to one writer, has been generally recognized to be "of outstanding importance in the history of the red man in literature."[1] Magua, Mahtoree and Wyandotté will be focused upon here. Almost invariably critics have erroneously linked these three together as if they were all of a kind, and nowhere have they received critical attention in proportion to their prominence.

The Last of the Mohicans, the first of Cooper's novels that deals with the open conflict between whites and Indians, contains his darkest, most malevolent savage. A contemporary of Cooper's, W.H. Gardiner, complained in a review that Magua is "one of those licensed instruments of romance, which belong rather to the diabolical order of creation, than to any tribe of human species, savage or civilized."[2] It is perplexing, in view of the interest in Cooper as myth-maker, that no Cooper critic seems to have noticed the accuracy of Gardiner's observation. Careful study reveals that Magua is in fact a devil. As a symbol of an evil more pervasive and more sinister than is possible in a single human personality, he becomes a myth-like character whose position of prominence in the novel rivals that of Hawkeye. In one sense, even more than Hawkeye, the Indian is the central character in the novel, for it is in reaction to him that the other characters act. It is clear that he has been carefully developed and that he bears a strong resemblance to the mythical Satan of Judeo-Christian religion--the Satan of Genesis and Milton's Paradise Lost. Yet, he is a New World creation, serving Cooper's own unique purposes.

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[1] Gregory L. Paine, "The Indians of The Leather-Stocking Tales," Studies in Philology, XXIII (January, 1926), 16.

Cooper's strong interest in the evil Indian he had created in The Last of the Mohicans may have influenced his creation of Mahtoree in his next novel, The Prairie. James Grossman claims that Cooper "mechanically" repeated Magua in Mahtoree.[3] But some fundamental differences need to be explored. One is the fact that the two Indians pursue different kinds of revenge. Mahtoree may be a "bad" Indian from a white man's viewpoint, but he is not a Magua-like Satan figure.

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[2] "Review of The Pioneers; The Last of the Mohicans," North American Review, XXIII (1826), 168.

[3] James Fenimore Cooper (New York, 1949), p.48.

In 1843, sixteen years after writing The Prairie, and two years after he had completed The Leather-Stocking Tales, Cooper created one of his most interesting and memorable Indians. Wyandotté, a major character in the novel by that title, is frequently referred to as Nick and sometimes as Saucy Nick or Old Nick. He has generally been considered to be one of Cooper's "bad" Indians, a Magua type. Close examination shows, however, that the difference between the two is of primary importance. Wyandotté has strong loyalties, while Magua has none; their revenge, although motivated in both cases by a flogging, reflects two quite different kinds of anger and hate. Cooper himself, along with his major characters, condemns Magua, at one point calling him "the Prince of Darkness."[4] But the author defends Wyandotté when the likable but rather lamentable Michael O'Hearn decides that he is a devil. In fact Cooper is careful at several points in the story to show that Wyandotté is not intended as a Satanic figure, a very necessary preparation if his conversion experience is to have any significance.

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[4] James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757 (New York, 1859), p.359.

The fact that Cooper's "bad" Indians are still generally lumped together as if they are all of a kind results, perhaps, not so much from a lack of perception on the part of the critics as from a lack of conviction that the "bad" Indian is worthy of careful attention. This study will question that assumption. It will attempt to show that Magua, Mahtoree and Wyandotté are three very different Indians and that an accurate understanding of each provides insight into Cooper's view of the Indian and his concern over the problem of Indian-white relations. The creation of three distinctly different Indians is the result of an exploration of the problem from three different angles--from a changing rather than a static viewpoint toward the Indian and his plight.

CHAPTER I

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

As most recent students of Cooper's work have noted, early criticism of his Indians was generally unfavorable. He was accused of idealizing the Indian and of various other inaccuracies in his delineation of his Indian characters. Far more notable figures than W. H. Gardiner were among his attackers. "His Indians, with proper respect be it said,/ Are just Natty Bumppo daubed with red,"[1] wrote James Russel Lowell in 1849. Later in the century Mark Twain was even more candid. Cooper "was almost always in error about his Indians;"[2] furthermore, "the difference between a Cooper Indian and the Indian that stands in front of the cigar-shop is not spacious,"[3] Twain said.

It was not until after the turn of the century that this view was seriously challenged. "The so-called 'noble red man' whom he is popularly supposed to have invented," wrote W. C. Brownell in 1909, "does not exist in his books at all."[4] "The truth is," Brownell points out, "that not only is Indian character not misrepresented by Cooper, at least in being idealized, but his Indian characters are as carefully studied and as successfully portrayed as his white ones."[5] Generally, Brownell swung the pendulum from the view that Cooper's Indians are "noble savages" to the view that they "are in the Main epitomized in Magua."[6] His short chapter on Cooper has had considerable influence upon subsequent criticism, as is evidenced by the many favorable references to his statement.

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[1] "A Fable for Critics," The American Tradition in Literature, ed. Scully Bradley, et al., 3rd. ed. (2 vols.; New York, 1967), I, 1641.

[2] Literary Essays (New York, 1897), p. 87.

[3] Ibid., p. 88.

[4] American Prose Masters (New York, 1909), pp. 20-21.

The next important statement about Cooper's work and about his interest in the Indian was D. H. Lawrence's study of American literature, published in 1923. "In his immortal friendship of Chingachgook and Natty Bumppo he dreamed the nucleus of a new society. That is, he dreamed a new human relationship,"[7] wrote Lawrence. As to what Satanic Magua's place is in the dream, he has little to say, except that he is "a 'wicked' . . . incarnation of evil."[8] He does not mention Mahtoree or Wyandotté. In an article published during this period, Gregory L. Paine makes a convincing argument for the authenticity of Cooper's Indians. He illustrates the fact that Cooper made a point of learning a great deal about the Indian.[9]

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[5] Ibid., p. 24.

[6] Ibid., pp. 22-23

[7] Studies in Classic American Literature (New York, 1923), p. 54

[8] Ibid., p. 58

The thirties produced little of significance as far as Cooper's Indians are concerned, although two important works on Cooper were published during the period: Robert Spiller's Fenimore Cooper, Critic of His Time and Henry W. Boynton's James Fenimore Cooper. Ivor Winters concluded in his In Defense of Reason, published in 1937, that The Last of the Mohicans "nowhere rises to a level of seriousness,"[10] a notion that has been held by several writers.

Neither did criticism in the forties show any significant understanding of Cooper's "bad" Indians. Carl Van Doren, in a chapter on Cooper, states only that Magua "plays the villain" and that Mahtoree "is another Magua."[11] He refers briefly to the novel Wyandotté, but not to the Indian himself. James Grossman's attitude toward Cooper's Indians is essentially the same as Brownell's. "Brownell's claim that Magua is Cooper's typical Indian is extravagantly stated," he says, "but fundamentally true."[12] Mahtoree he considers a mechanical repetition of Magua[13] and "Wyandotté . . . a Magua with a moral problem."[14] Grossman, however, does point to a need for further study of Cooper's "bad" Indians. He notes that for the most part the "discussion has been carried on in terms of the good Indians, Chingachgook and Uncas, and not of the wicked Magua."[15]

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[9] "The Indians of The Leather-Stocking Tales," Studies in Philology, XXIII (January, 1926), 16-39.

[10] Denver: Alan Swallow, 1937, p. 186.

[11] The American Novel (New York, 1940), pp. 29-30.

[12] James Fenimore Cooper (New York, 1949), p. 46.

[13] Ibid., p. 48.

Little interest was shown in Cooper's Indians, particularly his "bad" Indians, during the 1950's. One essay is an attempt to prove the authenticity of Cooper's Indian speech.[16] Two books of considerable importance for the study of American literature and of Cooper generally were published during the period: Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land and R. W. B. Lewis' The American Adam, but neither is of much value to this study.

The 1960's have seen a surge of interest in Cooper. Even his "bad" Indians have gotten some of the attention. Some of the most notable publications have been R.H. Zollner's "Conceptual Ambivalence in Cooper," American Literature, XXXI (January, 1960); David Noble's "Leather-Stocking and the Death of the American Adam," American Quarterly, XVI (Fall, 1964); Warren S. Walker's James Fenimore Cooper; James F. Beard's edition of The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper; Kay Seymore House's Cooper's Americans; Robert E. Spiller's James Fenimore Cooper and Donald A. Ringe's book of the same title. Ringe's study is, perhaps, the most significant of recent critical works. The theme of The Last of the Mohicans, like that of the other novels of the series, he identifies as "the moral implications of the westward march of civilization."[17] Although he does not see Magua as Satanic, but only as "evil,"[18] he is aware that the nature of the invasion of the New Land--the unbalancing of natural forces--is the lever that sets Magua in motion.[19] Ringe agrees generally with previous critics who claim that Mahtoree is a repetition of Magua, although he does not consider such a repetition a weakness in The Prairie, since it promotes the general theme of The Leather-Stocking Tales.[20] Ringe gives Wyandotté more attention than any previous writer. Yet, his comments about the Indian taken together would constitute little more than a couple of paragraphs, and most of that is an explanation of the action which involves Wyandotté. Perhaps what is most important is what he does not say. Unlike most critics who have mentioned Wyandotté up to this point, Ringe does not connect him with Magua.[21]

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[14] Ibid., p. 176.

[15] Ibid., p. 46.

[16] John T. Frederick, "Cooper's Eloquent Indians," PMLA, LXXI (December, 1956), 1004-1017.

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[17] James Fenimore Cooper (New York, 1962), p. 43.

[18] Ibid., pp. 42-44.

[19] Ibid., p. 46.

[20] Ibid., pp. 101-105.

[21] Ibid., p. 104.

Kay Seymour House has given more attention to Cooper's Indians than any other writer, and, like Ringe, she succeeds in carrying the discussion somewhat beyond Brownell's statement. She sees Cooper's Indians as highly varied in that they occupy a wide spectrum from wise chief Tamenund at one extreme to the "demonic" type at the other. She does not distinguish between Magua, Mahtoree and Wyandotté, however, and echoes Brownell and Grossman by saying that "Wyandotté" . . . is "a development of the earlier character of Le Renard Subtil. . . ."[22]

In spite of the increased interest in Cooper and his Indians during the 1960's, at least three very important characters in his Indian novels remain essentially unexamined. Donald Ringe is correct when he notes that Magua is the product of a process out of control, and David Noble is accurate when he points out that Magua "hates the white man for destroying the Indian culture,"[23] but the Indian is more complex and more cynical than either suggests. It is beyond his mere hate for the white man that a discussion of Magua needs to begin, for he is an Indian who shows little more loyalty to his race than he does to the whites who believe they can trust him. Mahtoree also hates the white man, and like Magua he is dangerous and deadly. But whereas Magua is evil and despicable, Mahtoree, like a violent storm or a wild animal, is attractive and in a sense admirable. A respected leader of his people, his primary concerns are not revenge against the white man, but the maintenance of his position and the destruction of Hard-Heart, his Indian rival. Wyandotté is neither unleashed energy nor is he a devil. His actions, though perhaps lamentable at times, are capable of generating understanding and sympathy. A careful analysis shows him to be quite unlike his predecessor, the devil Indian, Magua.

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[22] Cooper's Americans (Ohio State University Press, 1965), p. 49.

[23] "Leatherstocking and the Death of the American Adam," American Quarterly, XVI (Fall, 1964), 422.

CHAPTER II

MAGUA, COOPER'S AMERICAN DEVIL

One of the most noticeable facts about Magua is his position of prominence, both as a character in The Last of the Mohicans and as a Cooper Indian. He is the first major character introduced in the novel, and as the story progresses it is he who proves to be the key to the chase-escape theme. When he is finally vanquished the action of the story is completed. Twice as many chapter epigraphs refer to him as to any other character. Those found at the beginning of chapters four, eight, eleven, twelve, twenty-four, twenty-seven, twenty-eight and thirty are all direct references to him. No other Indian so controls the action of a Cooper novel, and few are introduced in such careful detail.

Another fact equally apparent is the effort Cooper made to emphasize Magua's evil, superhuman nature. Consistently and frequently throughout the novel he and his characters refer to Magua in language customarily reserved for demonic, other-worldly figures. Magua is said to utter "an unearthly shout" as he stabs Uncas.[1] Among the many other derogatory epithets he directs at the Indian, Hawkeye calls him "that rampaging devil." (236) Duncan Heyward accuses him of being a "malignant monster," (400) and Magua's deep guttural laugh sounds to him "like the hellish taunt of a demon." (330) Cora Munro uses the terms "monster" (131) and "fiend" (132) to refer to him. "The leader of these savages is possessed of an evil spirit that no power short of Omnipotence can tame," declares David Gamut, (282) and Cooper, as has been noted, suggests that he is "the Prince of Darkness."

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[1] James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757 (New York, 1859), p. 359. (Subsequent references will be indicated in the text by the page number of this edition of The Last of the Mohicans.)

It is not surprising that Alice Munro is the first to detect Magua's evil nature, since she is of fair complexion, the ideal of innocence and goodness peculiar to romantic fiction of the time. She is startled when the "Indian runner" glides by her "unexpectedly. . . . 'Are such spectres frequent in the woods, Heyward?'" she asks. (23)

That Magua is unusually elusive and treacherous becomes increasingly apparent each time he appears in the story. Hawkeye expresses alarm when he finds Heyward and Munro's daughters depending upon Magua as a guide. He tries to wing the Indian with his rifle, but the shot has little effect, and Magua bounds into the woods. Chingachgook and his strong, agile son Uncas have no more success at stopping Magua than the white man had and return after a short chase. Hawkeye, who is known throughout The Leather-Stocking Tales for his deadly aim, is displeased with his poor shot and attempts to explain. "I heard the imp, brushing over the dry leaves, like a black snake," he says, "and blinking a glimpse of him, just over ag'in yon big pine, I pulled as it might be on the scent; but't wouldn't do! and yet for a reasoning aim, if anybody but myself had touched the trigger, I would call it a quick sight. . . ." (53) The fact is that Magua can not be stopped until he has carried out his evil designs--if, in fact, he is ever really stopped.

Shortly afterward Heyward has an opportunity to stop the Indian. Magua appears in front of the cave where he and Munro's daughters are hidden, and Heyward takes deliberate aim at what would seem close range and fires his pistol. Certain of his shot, he rushes to the entrance of the cave, but all he sees is a glimpse of Magua's "dark figure, stealing around a low and narrow ledge." (111) Like Hawkeye, he has only scratched the Indian.

Later, when he has captured Heyward and the Munro girls, Magua comments to Heyward on the fact that both men have missed him. "Longue Carbine! his rifle is good," Magua says, "and his eye never shut; but like the short gun of the white chief, it is nothing against the life of Le Subtil!" (113) This might seem mere unrestrained boasting except that these incidents and succeeding ones illustrate his point so well. In the scene that follows, the knife of Chingachgook proves to be no more effective than the weapons of the white men.

After the rescue party has dispatched Magua's followers, the interest focuses upon Magua and Chingachgook as they grapple in a death struggle on the ground. Hawkeye and the others stand helplessly by, for each time they attempt to assist Chingachgook, his own head and body come into view. "In vain did Uncas dart around the cloud [of dust]," we are told, "with a wish to strike his knife into the heart of his father's foe; the threatening rifle of Hawkeye was raised and suspended in vain, while Duncan endeavored to seize the limbs of the Huron with hands that appeared to have lost their power." (143) As the two Indians struggle they are rolling toward the edge of the little clearing on top of the hill. Suddenly "the Mohican . . . found an opportunity to make a powerful thrust with his knife; Magua suddenly relinquished his grasp, and fell backward without motion and seemingly without life." (143) Hawkeye rushes forward to crush the Indian's skull with the butt of his rifle, but Magua rolls off the precipice on the edge of which he has fallen and bounds away. In Hawkeye's view this is very unnatural for a subdued Indian.

Toward the end of the story, just as Magua is about to escape for the third time, Hawkeye, with deadly aim, fires at him. The Indian drops from the cliff where he had been about to pull himself up with the help of a small bush and "glided past the fringe of shrubbery which clung to the mountain. . . ." (428) The scene is in marked contrast to the usual sights and noises connected with the death of the Indian in Cooper novels. Not at all uncommon is the whack of a rifle butt or the deadly thrust of a knife to make sure of a fallen foe. The bloody flaying of a scalp is the usual occurrence where Indians, "good" or "bad", are among the victorious party. One of the most memorable death scenes in The Last of the Mohicans is that of an Indian who clings to the limb of a tree for a moment after being shot by Hawkeye before he plunges with a splash into the river below. (94) The physical detail in the death and scalping of Mahtoree, as will be discussed in the next chapter, is fully supplied. So is the detail in Chingachgook's scalping of Arrowhead in The Pathfinder. In this scene, however, there is no thump of the body against the earth nor crash among the bushes. The body is never mentioned, and no one goes to take the scalp, not even Chingachgook, whose son Magua has killed. This is very unusual for an Indian, since his code requires that he scalp for revenge. That Hawkeye and not Chingachgook is the victor might seem to have some bearing on the taking of the scalp if it were not for the fact that in the rescue scene discussed above Chingachgook scalps those Indians killed by the white men as well as those he personally slays. (144) Although Magua is overcome, vanquished, it is clear that Cooper has made a point of preserving his other-worldly nature.

That Magua belongs "to the diabolical order of creation" is evident in another and perhaps more significant respect. Like the mythical Satan of Judeo-Christian tradition, he is an outcast obsessed with revenge. He is an artful and an eloquent speaker who can sway his people to support his cause. Like Satan and quite unlike the typically "bad" Indian who vents his feelings in immediate physical violence, Magua broods and plans. His sagacity, his hate and his pride are poignantly emphasized. Although no effort will be made here to prove an influence, the precise nature of Magua's evil characteristics becomes particularly apparent when he is compared with Milton's version of Satan.[2] The language used to refer to the two Satanic figures is frequently similar and sometimes identical. Milton, of course, used the phrase, "Prince of Darkness"[3] to describe his Satan. Frequently he refers to Satan as a "Fiend" and as "the Devil," terms, as has been pointed out, that Cooper had his characters use to describe Magua.

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[2] That Cooper possessed any significant knowledge of or interest in Milton some critics seem to doubt. According to Henry W. Boynton, Cooper "had a blind spot for Milton." James Fenimore Cooper (New York, 1931), p. 79. Marcel Clavel, the French critic, takes the opposite viewpoint. He points out that Boynton drew his conclusion from Susan Cooper's statements about her father's reading interests. According to Clavel, Susan had said that it was difficult to get her father to read more than a page or two of Paradise Lost aloud to the family at a time, a statement in itself which shows some familiarity with Milton. Fenimore Cooper (Aix-en-Provence: Imprimerie Universitaire de Provence, 1958), pp. 253-254. Perhaps a more significant fact is that Cooper used quotations from Milton as epigraphs for five chapters of his novels. They are found at the beginning of chapter six of The Headsman, chapter nineteen of The Pathfinder, chapter six of The Deerslayer, chapter eighteen of The Two Admirals and chapter six of The Crater. Three of these are from Paradise Lost. Also, it would seem strange for one who "had a blind spot for Milton" to make the com-

When Magua first captures the Munro girls, he is observed sitting alone brooding, "without participating in the . . . meal, and apparently buried in deep thought." (125) He is one who is constantly "plotting evil." (359) He is a "silent but sullen guide." (28) Cooper speaks of the Indian's "gloomy reserve," (124) and points out that his "vengeance . . . sought a deeper and more malignant enjoyment" than physical punishment. (136) Although a fallen chief, Magua, like Satan, remains proud and arrogant.

"None but a fiend could meditate such vengeance!" Cora Munro exclaims, when Magua tells her that he will kill Duncan and Alice if she refuses to become his wife. (132) When she asks why he does not seek revenge directly upon her father for the flogging he received, he replies: "The arms of the pale-faces are long, and their knives are sharp!

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ment Cooper made upon obtaining his first view of Switzerland's Lake Geneva. "I shall not affirm that this was the finest view we had yet seen in Switzerland," he remarked, "but I do think it was the most exquisite. It was Goethe compared to Schiller; Milton to Shakespeare; Racine to Corneille. Other places had a grander nature, more awful principals, and altogether sublimer features; but I cannot recall one, in which elements, of themselves noble and imposing, were so admirably blended with extensive, delicate, and faultlessly fine details." Sketches of Switzerland, Vol. I (Philadelphia, 1836), 184.

[3] Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), p. 415 (x).

. . . why should Le Renard go among the muskets of his warriors, when he holds the spirit of the gray-head in his hands?" (130) Satan employs the same kind of reasoning when his followers suggest another expedition to heaven. "Nor shall we need/ With dangerous expedition to invade/ Heav'n, whose high walls fear no assault or Siege,"[4] he tells them, for he has a more subtle plan. He will revenge himself upon God through his newly created children. The intensity of Magua's desire for revenge is evident when Cora attempts to persuade him to forgive her father. "The spirit of a Huron is never drunk; it remembers forever!" he answers. (130) How like Satan when he claims an "unconquerable Will,/ And study of revenge, immortal hate,/ And courage never to submit or yield. . . ."[5]

When his chiefs discuss the means of retrieving Cora from the Delaware camp, Magua is said to be a "silent and respectful listener." (355) Only after the other chiefs have spoken, and after he has weighed their comments carefully, does he speak. He flatters the "self love of his auditors." (356) He tells them how wise they are. Then he proposes that he go alone into the Delaware camp to retrieve Cora. In such a manner are Satan's followers persuaded that he should go alone into the Garden of Eden.

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[4] Ibid., p. 240, (ii).

[5] Ibid., p. 214, (i).

It seems significant that Cooper chooses this point in the novel to suggest that Magua might be thought of as "the Prince of Darkness."

The scene on the cliff where Cora and Uncas are killed produces an equally striking similarity in the nature of the two evil figures. By this point in the story it has become clear that Magua's attitude toward Cora is tinged with a feeling that vies with his desire for revenge. When he is finally convinced that Cora will not, under any circumstances, go with him as his wife, he raises his knife to kill her, but "with a bewildered air, like one who doubted," immediately drops it again. (426) This is the only instance in the novel in which the Indian deviates from his plan of revenge. Similarly Satan deviates in a single instance. During the time that he watches Eve unobserved, "the Evil one abstracted stood/ From his own evil, and for the time remain'd/ Stupidly good, of enmity disarm'd/ Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge. . . ."[6]

In order to strengthen his depiction of Magua as a highly unusual figure, Cooper frequently tells the reader, quite pointedly, that the Indian is not an ordinary savage. That he can forego food when he is hungry and contemplate a sophisticated form of mental torture Cooper saw as "remarkable in an Indian." (125) Magua is so gratified at having captured the Munro girls that he stands by quietly while his warriors plunder their effects. "The conduct of this savage had formed a solitary exception to that of his fellows," (113) Cooper points out. He is not afraid of the bear in the Huron camp, for he is "far above the more vulgar superstitions of his tribe." (331)

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[6] Ibid., p. 389, (ix).

What Cooper does not say is, perhaps, more effective than his assurance that Magua is not an ordinary Indian. Whether or not Magua, the chief, possesses or ever has possessed any of those physical attributes so necessary to a leader of a band of savages--the kind that are attributed to Mahtoree, Hard-Heart, Uncas and others--we are never told. We are only told that "there was an air of neglect about his person," and that the blending of his war paint caused his "swarthy lineaments" to appear "savage and repulsive." (111) This emphasis upon the unpleasant aspects of his appearance helps to suggest a physically and thus a morally malignant individual. Also, there is something sinister about the fact that in spite of his seeming lack of physical vitality, he speeds away so fast that the swiftest can not catch him.

It seems ironic that so many students of Cooper have insisted that Magua is typical of "bad" Indians or Indians generally, when the writer himself went to so much trouble to show that Magua is quite unlike the usual savage. Nor, in spite of the fact that he bears a close resemblance to

Milton's Satan, is he a transport from the Old World. Like Natty Bumppo, Magua is a New World creation, a product of New World experience. Although a member of an inferior and unusually treacherous tribe, he represents something more than the bad characteristics of his people.

Magua himself tells us how he became evil and in the process reveals Cooper's purpose in his creation. "Magua was born a chief," he tells Cora, "and a warrior among the red Huron of the lakes; he saw the suns of twenty summers before he saw a pale-face; and he was happy! Then his Canada fathers came into the woods, and taught him to drink the fire-water, and he became a rascal." (128) He tries to suppress his anger for a moment after this speech, but soon bursts out again without provocation from Cora. "Who gave him the fire-water?" he asks. "Who made him a villain? 'T was the pale-faces, the people of your own color." Cora suggests that her father has been just in whipping him. "Justice!" he exclaims. "Is it justice to make evil, and then to punish for it?" At this point he laments the passing of the day when the red man was free to roam the forest. "The pale-faces have driven the redskins from their hunting grounds . . .," (128-129) he says. But of greater consequence for him is the fact that after he drank the whiskey, "the Hurons drove him from the graves of his fathers, as they would chase the hunted buffalo." (128) Thus he is not only an enemy of the white man, he is, for a time, the enemy of his own people, and at one time or another he fights for and against both his own tribe and its enemies. There is evidence that his ties with all red remain tenuous and unstable.

It is true that Magua tries to unify the Huron and the Delaware, a fact which seems to have led some critics--David Noble, for example, as was noted earlier--to believe that his primary aim is to unify Indian against white. He asks why they should "brighten their tomahawks, and sharpen their knives against each other?" (364) But he is using the Delawares, not joining with them. One of the Delaware chiefs, suspicious of Magua's overtures of friendship, "gravely bowed his acquiescence to what he knew to be false . . . ." (364) There is no reason to believe that Magua returns to his people--to those who have beaten him and against whom he has fought--for any other reason than that he needs them to help him complete his scheme of revenge.

That Magua's condition is symptomatic of what is happening to the Indian generally is evidenced by the fact that the world of the best of the Indian has been similarly shattered. "The Dutch landed," Chingachgook tells his friend, Hawkeye, "and gave my people the fire-water; they drank until the heavens and the earth seemed to meet, and they foolishly thought they had found the great spirit. Then they parted with their land. Foot by foot, they were driven back from the shores, until I, that am a chief and a

Sagamore, have never seen the sun shine but through the trees, and have never visited the graves of my fathers!" (39)

Since Magua's unhappiness lies in the fact that he has become separated from order and meaning, it would seem logical to assume that the earlier happiness of which he boasts consisted of order and meaning. In a world without the white man, his actions fit into the natural order of things. Whatever his shortcomings, they presented no particular problem. Chingachgook suggests as much when he explains the nature of the Indian's world before the coming of the white man. "The salt lake gave us its fish," he says, "the wood its deer, and the air its birds. We took wives who bore us children . . . and we kept the Maquas beyond the sound of our songs of triumph." (39) But with the coming of the white man, order and balance in the world of the Indian has been destroyed. The best of the Indian is literally disappearing. A member of one of the most despised tribes has been transformed into a devil. Magua's natural Indian sagacity, his ability to hate, his pride and his ability to trick and sway other people has been perverted and magnified into uncontrollable, superhuman proportions. For this the white man is entirely responsible.

Little hint of a solution to the problem of Indian-white relations is offered in The Last of the Mohicans. The relationship of mutual respect and loyalty achieved by

Chingachgook, Hawkeye and Uncas is of no lasting significance, since the death of Uncas marks the end of his tribe. But perhaps a concern with solution would have detracted from Cooper's interest in dramatizing the problem. The Prairie, as a study of Mahtoree will show, has more to suggest about a solution and about the Indian's share of responsibility for the quality of Indian-white relations.

CHAPTER III

MAHTOREE OF THE PRAIRIE

In spite of his cunning and treacherous self-centeredness, Mahtoree possesses qualities considered desirable not only by his own people but by people of different creeds and races. A Greek or a Roman soldier would have been proud to have possessed his physical attributes, his courage and his bearing. When Leather-Stocking asks to speak with the chief, we are told that "a warrior of powerful frame advanced out of the dark circle, and placed himself before the captives, with that high and proud bearing for which a distinguished Indian chief is ever so remarkable."[1] In addition to his leadership qualities, Mahtoree is capable, occasionally, of acts of kindness and respect toward those who are at his mercy.

At several points in the story Cooper reminds the reader of Mahtoree's qualities as a leader. "His limbs were in their greatest vigor," he tells us, "his courage at its fullest height." (338) Such a "rare combination of moral and physical influence" made him an unusual leader. (338) "It was by exhibiting the force of his character . . .

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[1] James Fenimore Cooper, The Prairie: A Tale (New York, 1859), p. 359. (Subsequent references will be indicated in the text by the page number of this edition of The Prairie.)

that Mahtoree obtained and strengthened his ascendency among his people. . .," (395) Cooper says, at another point.

Although easily angered, Mahtoree can regain his composure in a moment and expose the better side of his nature. Once, angered by the cunning of the trapper, his self-control is momentarily shattered; but then "a nobler expression, and one that better became the character of a brave got possession of his features." (267-268) The last glimpse the reader gets of the chief reinforces the frequent suggestions that he is not altogether bad. "Had one been there to watch the countenance of Mahtoree as he crossed the water that separated him from the most formidable . . . of his rivals," one might have observed hate and "heartless treachery" on the face of the Indian, says Cooper. Yet, one "might have believed that the flashings of the Teton's eye and the expansion of his nostrils had their origin in a nobler sentiment. . . ." (412)

Mahtoree is remarkable for his purely animal qualities. His senses are keen, his movements accurate. Like a stealthy, lissome cat, he goes into Ishmael Bush's sleeping camp to steal his livestock. Almost instinctively he stops at the right moment and proceeds with caution. His actions are never fool-hardy, and he never allows his resentment toward the intruder to thwart the pursuit of his singular objective. That Mahtoree's actions at this point become no more sinister than they do is partly due to the fact that

Ishmael deserves to have his livestock stolen, a fact that the old trapper himself verifies. "He who ventures far into the prairie, must abide by the ways of its owners," (74) he tells Ishmael.

Mahtoree's treatment of the old trapper, Leather-Stocking, and the white women, Ellen Wade and Inez, seems unusual for an Indian who has so often been called a copy of evil Magua. Convinced that the trapper is telling the truth about his hidden companions, Mahtoree "took the hand of the old man, and laid it gently on his head, in token of the respect that was due to the other's years and experience." (261) Shortly afterward he lays "his hand gently on the shoulder of the trapper" and leads him near the thicket, where the old man's companions are hidden. (263) As a captive the trapper is allowed to circulate about the Indian camp, carrying his rifle and talking with whomever he pleases.

Although Inez is completely at Mahtoree's mercy, he has no thought of avenging himself upon his white enemies through her. Rather, he welcomes her into his lodge and promises her companion one of his braves for a husband. Told by the trapper that the young woman must be wooed in the fashion of the white man, "Mahtoree pondered deeply, and in a wonder that he did not attempt to conceal." (359-360) He makes an effort to profit by the trapper's advice by delivering an eloquent speech in the presence of Inez.

He calls her a "flower" that he has "found on the prairie" and tries to convince her logically that she should stay with him. "Her feet are tender," he says, "and she cannot walk to the door of her father. . . ." Finally, "saluting the females in the cold but dignified manner of his people," he goes away to let Inez think the matter over. (360-361)

Unlike Magua, who is in disharmony with the universe, Mahtoree's world is complete. He is the soul of a moving band of warriors, a fact that is often graphically illustrated in the unfolding of the story. As he and his party look for the whites hidden in the prairie grass, his warriors cluster about him to gather instructions and then move "slowly and cautiously from the center in straight . . . lines." (50) When there are decisions to be made, Mahtoree usually takes "the entire disposition of arrangements upon himself." (57) He has personal ambitions, of course, and, like Magua, he seeks a personal revenge. But he is not lashing out, like Magua, at a world in which meaning has been destroyed. It is jealousy and not malignant hate bent upon blind revenge that brings him into mortal combat with his most serious rival, Hard-Heart. By killing Hard-Heart he could insure and heighten his security and prominence among his people. There is no reason to believe that the rivalry between the two Indians is particularly unique, and Cooper frequently makes a point of the fact that Mahtoree is not significantly different from most Sioux warriors. He is only a little stronger, a little more cunning and a little more intelligent, perhaps, than most. In Cooper's words, "there was a conjunction of all the several qualities of the others in his person and character." (338) When the Indian goes into Ishmael's camp to steal his livestock, he is said to enact "his subtle and characteristic part." (66) Although Mahtoree has profited somewhat from his associations with the white man--he is less superstitious than the average Sioux--he is, according to Cooper, "in all essentials a warrior of the prairies." (356)

That Cooper intended a quite different Indian from Magua in his creation of Mahtoree is evident in several other respects. There can be no argument, for example, as to whether or not Mahtoree possesses super-human characteristics. Each instance in which he escapes death is entirely plausible. Once, as the chief approaches the party of whites hidden in the grass, Middleton and Hover raise their weapons, aim and pull the trigger. The only sound is the harmless click of the locks. "I have cast away your priming," Leather-Stocking tells them, "for certain death would follow your rashness." (334) When Paul Hover tries to get a shot at the Indian as he crosses the river in pursuit of the white party, Mahtoree dives into the water and the bullet strikes his horse as it rears up. (329) The duel scene on the sand bar in the river leaves no unanswered questions, no mystery. Mahtoree and Hard-Heart trade blows and kill one another's horses. Finally the Sioux chief receives a mortal wound. "Boy of the Loups!" he shouts at the Pawnee, "the scalp of a mighty Dahcotah shall never dry in Pawnee smoke!" (417) He then plunges into the swiftest part of the river, pursued by Hard-Heart, who soon returns, "flourishing the scalp of the Great Sioux." (418)

Mahtoree's method of getting his way among the Sioux chiefs is in marked contrast to Magua's Satan-like flattery and deception. Mahtoree wins by the force of courage and threat, in a way that one might imagine a savage to dominate his fellows. One point in the novel is particularly noticeable in this regard. Near the end of the novel, in much the same way that Magua meets with his chiefs to decide how to go about retrieving Cora, Mahtoree meets with his chiefs to plan the fate of his captives. Here the similarity ends. Mahtoree is impatient with the talk. Desiring to expose Obed as a false medicine man, he interrupts one of the speakers "in a voice in which authority was mingled with contempt, and at the close with a keen tone of irony. . . ." (376) The interruption shocks the members of the council, but they comply with his wishes.

The difference in the language used to describe the two Indians is significant. Whereas Magua is said to be a "fiend," a "monster," a "spectre," "the Prince of Darkness," etc., Cooper only once equates Mahtoree with other-worldly figures. He is said to stalk through Ishmael Bush's camp "like the master of evil," (63) but it is important to note that no further effort of any kind is made to create a similarity between the Indian and Satan or other evil figures. Throughout the story Mahtoree is referred to in much milder and more ordinary language. He is spoken of as "the sagacious and wary Teton," (62) "the wily Teton," (261) "the crafty Mahtoree." (262) At worst he is a "demagogue" or he displays the "temper of a tyrant." (374)

Although Mahtoree possesses qualities essential to a leader of a band of savages and an occasional spark of feeling, he is, no doubt, a self-centered and treacherous individual. The origin and nature of the bad side of his character are not, however, like Magua's evil, to be explained as a result of the white man's abuse of the New Land and its inhabitants. He more than once captures the trapper and his friends with very little difficulty and with equal facility steals the squatter's horses, rendering him practically harmless. He strongly resents the intruder, but compared with his dedication to the extermination of Hard-Heart, the whites are never more than a minor concern. The nature of his bad characteristics suggests that he would have been bad had he never heard of the white man.

It is important, in view of the fact that Cooper often seems to equivocate on the matter, to note that he is not condemning Mahtoree for being Indian--for being cunning and barbaric. In these respects he is hardly recognizable from the "good" Indian of the story. Cooper could well have been describing Mahtoree rather than Hard-Heart when he wrote the following: "The Indian in question was in every particular a warrior of fine stature and admirable proportions. As he cast aside his mask . . . . his countenance appeared in all the gravity, the dignity, and, it may be added, in the terror of his profession." (231) Like Mahtoree he hunts to kill and to scalp.

It is in his similarity to Ishmael Bush that the precise nature and significance of Mahtoree's bad qualities become apparent. As if to make sure the reader does not miss the similarity, Cooper ponders the fact that two such diverse peoples as Mahtoree and Ishmael's clan could have so much in common "in their habits and . . . . in their characters." (338) He again points up the similarity when he refers to Mahtoree and his people, the Sioux, as "the Ishmaelites of the American deserts." (47) Like Ishmael and his clan, who attempt to escape the restraints of civilization, Mahtoree and his followers are renegades among the Indian tribes of the plains. They are not trusted to keep their agreements or to respect the territorial rights of their neighbors. But of more importance is the strong similarity between the personality traits of the two men and the fact that each is responsible for the bad side of his nature.

Cooper states the core of the matter when he says of Mahtoree: "Like thousands of more enlightened beings who fancy they are able to go through the trials of human existence without any other support than their own resolutions, his morals were accommodating and his motives selfish." (357) We hear more about Mahtoree's arrogant, self-centered nature from the trapper, who sternly rebukes the Indian for his failure to look to a higher power. "A warrior who lives in a house with the clouds for its roof . . . and who daily sees the power of the great spirit, should be more humble," (262) he cautions the chief. In contrast, it is his ability to look to the Wahcondah that marks the moral superiority of Hard-Heart. "Look at the noble Pawnee, Teton," Leather-Stocking challenges Weuncha, Mahtoree's assistant, "and see what a Red-skin may become who fears the Master of Life, and follows his laws." (392)

Although Ishmael Bush is a product of a so-called Christian world, he is careful not to let the teaching of his religion interfere with his actions. He first does as he sees fit and then calls upon God to sanction what he has done. "These villains are of no religion!" (209) Middleton exclaims, shortly after Inez has been rescued from the squatter and his clan. Inez expresses horror at the fact that Ishmael aids her kidnapper and then forces an agreement upon her and calls upon God as a witness. "Was it not awful to call upon good God to witness so sinful a compact?" (209) she asks Middleton. The nature of Ishmael's dependence upon a higher power is particularly evident when he decides to execute Abiram for the murder of his son Asa. In order to soothe herself and her husband, Esther reads the Bible while Ishmael listens. "Esther had made a sort of convenient ally of the word of God," (443) Cooper says. Ishmael has less need than she does for this symbolic link with God. He comes to listen to her read only at those critically trying points in their lives. Perhaps even this interest is shown to placate her. He refuses to show her brother mercy when she asks for it, but he makes no effort to find out what the Bible might advise on such a matter.

The two villains show as little respect for the rights and welfare of their relatives and immediate associates as they do toward a higher power or their respective societies. Both demand loyalty from their followers and unquestioned compliance with their wishes. "You talk of law," Asa says, in a moment of anger to his father, "as if you knew of none, and yet you keep me down as though I had not life and wants of my own." (111) The argument had started when Asa complained about the squatter's brutal act of sending a bullet near Ellen Wade because she did not answer when he called to her from a distance. She had made the mistake of being preoccupied with her own thoughts rather than being attentive to Ishmael's interests.

Mahtoree's heartless unconcern for the feelings and rights of his devoted wife Cooper presents as particularly reprehensible. He tells her that he has no more need for her when he decides to take Inez as a wife. She tries to appeal to him through their young son, and for a moment, Cooper says, "the stern nature of the Teton seemed touched. But shaking off the grateful sentiment, like one who would gladly be rid of any painful, because reproachful, emotion, he laid his hand calmly on the arm of his wife, and led her directly in front of Inez." (362)

Both Mahtoree and Ishmael think of themselves as fair and reasonable, but fair and reasonable they equate precisely with their own desires. At one point in the story Ishmael and the Indian agree to combine their forces and to make certain concessions from which both will benefit. Part of the agreement is that Mahtoree will surrender the white women. The Indian changes his mind when he decides to take Inez as a wife, however, and decides that it is fair to give Ishmael his young wife, Tachechana, instead of keeping his bargain, since Ishmael's wife is old and the squatter appears to him to be in need of another. (368) Ishmael's actions are equally arbitrary when he decides to hand out his justice to Obed, Middleton, Hover and the trapper. He conducted "the business of the hour with as much composure as if the species of patriarchal power wielded was universally recognized," notes Cooper. (425) Ishmael considers it justice when he returns Inez, whom he has helped the kidnapper Abiram hold captive. He accepts some responsibility for the act, but he blames Middleton for breaking into his camp to rescue her. He has no difficulty believing the score properly settled when he returns Inez to her husband.

The paralleling of the Indian and the squatter suggests that irreverence and selfish ruthlessness are neither peculiar to the Indian nor to the white man. The bad nature the squatter brings with him out of the white settlements is to be found in kind on the American plains. Toward the end of the story Cooper supports this thesis by having Leather-Stocking philosophize on the evil in mankind. "I have seen much of the folly of man," he says, "for his natur' is the same, be he born in the wilderness, or be he born in the town." (297) The trapper insists that man is what he is and can not be changed, like the animals that can not be tamed. After he had attempted to tame the bear and the deer, "the bear would bite, and the deer would run. . .," (279) he says. The parallel also suggests that irreverence and selfish ruthlessness are as reprehensible in the Indian as in the white man.

Cooper's concern with morally reprehensible evil in the world of the Indian does not obscure the fact that he is concerned, as he was in The Last of the Mohicans, about the "moral implications" of the westward march. Frequently he has the trapper lament the destruction of the timber along the streams and marshes and the needless killing of the buffalo. Hard-Heart speaks scornfully of the fact that the Pawnee are not consulted when white men trade with "the Tawney-faces" for the hunting grounds of his people. "Is a nation to be sold like the skin of a beaver?" (234) he asks. Ishmael Bush and his clan obviously represent that destructive type frequently portrayed in The Leather-Stocking Tales. However, the fact that the Indian is held responsible for being bad adds a dimension to the problem of Indian-white relations not present in the earlier novel.

Whereas The Last of the Mohicans presents good and bad whites and corrupted and uncorrupted Indians, and seems to imply that the only answer for the Indian would be the withdrawal of the white man, The Prairie presents a struggle of good Indians and good whites against bad Indians and bad whites. The result is that the Indian is seen as having some responsibility for the quality of Indian-white relations. He must share the responsibility for the nature of his world even when it includes the white man. The less than enthusiastic, yet hopeful note on which the novel is concluded results from the fact that those Indians and whites who triumph seem to possess the desire and the ability to be fair and honest in their dealings with one another. This ability results from the fact that they all respect the laws of God and the just laws of human societies. Hard-Heart and his people keep their compacts with the white man and with other Indian tribes. Middleton and Inez are as certain to keep their word and to revere God's laws as are the trapper and Hard-Heart. So are Ellen Wade and Paul Hover. The hope for a workable relationship is in a sort of mutual religiosity, fair mindedness and respect. Although Mahtoree's worst traits in no way approach the Satanic evil of Magua, neither is there the hint of tragedy in his downfall that is clearly evident in the downfall of Magua. His misfortune is personal, whereas Magua's adversity has wide implications for his race. Mahtoree's weaknesses are common human weaknesses and his untimely end is in no way lamentable.

CHAPTER IV

WYANDOTTÉ, AN INDIAN WHO PROFITS FROM CIVILIZATION

There is no doubt that Wyandotté or Nick, as he is more frequently referred to in the novel, seems to have much in common with Magua. Like the devil Indian, Nick was once a respected chief among his people, and like Magua he is chased away by his tribe for drinking the white man's fire-water. He too is flogged by a white military officer and highly resents the offense. Ultimately, like Magua, he has his revenge against the offending white man. Yet, behind this outline of similar experience is a quite different Indian, for similar experience in this case produces different results. Nick has been devised for a different setting, and he has a role to play in a story that has little in common with The Last of the Mohicans.

In most essential respects Wyandotté was written from a viewpoint opposite that taken in The Prairie and The Last of the Mohicans. In each of the earlier novels there is a sense of imminent danger as a small party of whites penetrates the American wilds. Wyandotté, however, opens in a relaxed and settled atmosphere. Nick is the only Indian named in the story and the only one the reader sees until near the end of the tale. Although he is concerned about the fact that white men "take away Indian's hunting ground,"[1] it is he who leads Captain Willoughby to the idyllic spot a hundred or so miles west of Albany, New York, where he claims a large tract of land and builds a house. Not only is Nick "well satisfied with the transaction," (18) he is amused that he could receive payment for showing the Captain a beaver pond from which he has caught most of the beavers and frightened the others away. Such a transaction he calls, "sellin' beaver when he all run away." (18) The important fact for the development of the story is that the Captain does not significantly disturb the Indian or the wild animals when he establishes his residence.

It seems more than a fortunate convenience that it was unnecessary for the Captain to clear land for his first planting. The drained beaver pond provides him with hundreds of acres of fertile land. There is no need for the chopping and waste that Natty Bumppo lamented through _The Leather-Stocking Tales_. Unlike most settlers, the Captain does not leave a line of brush around the edge of the farm that will clearly mark-off the cleared land. When a few trees are cut, the brush is piled out of sight in the forest. Thus the farm and the wilderness come together without a harsh reminder that the new settlement has been legitimately placed in the wilderness. The white man, in this instance, has complied with Cooper's belief that the settler has a moral obligation in the manner in which he settles the New Land.[2]

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[1] James Fenimore Cooper, _Wyandotté: or, The Hutted Knoll_ (New York, 1859), p. 15. (Subsequent references will be indicated in the text by the page number of this edition of _Wyandotté_.)

The setting to which Nick again and again returns is noticeable in another important respect. Unlike most early settlements, it is a miniature of civilization, and the pursuits of its inhabitants are civilized. The Captain is a gentleman, capable of objective reasoning and some appreciation of the products of civilization. He provides protection in the fortress-like dwelling and acts as a fair and just authority over his employees. A minister resides in Willoughby's house; a miller, a mason and other artisans and workers live in their own cabins within the clearing. Nick, unlike Magua and Mahtoree, who wish to repulse the invading white man, comes amicably to the new settlement for his own gain. In a sense he is the invader, rather than the white man; however, he has not come to disrupt and spoil. In spite of the fact that Captain Willoughby has more than once flogged him, he is not seeking an opportunity for revenge, nor is rum his primary interest, although he drinks an inordinate amount of it.

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[2] Gregory L. Paine observes that to Cooper "the development of America could be justified only if it were done righteously." "The Indians of The Leather-Stocking Tales," Studies in Philology, XXIII (January, 1926) p. 16.

The settled, secure atmosphere that prevails throughout a large portion of the book is frequently enlivened by an amusing incident or a wry sort of fun-poking repartee. Nick's character is given a dimension not hinted at in his stern, treacherous predecessors, Magua and Mahtoree, when he is allowed to take part in the amusement. In fact, it is Nick, more than anyone else who sets the light tone of the story when he teases the Captain about buying a deserted beaver pond. We see more of this side of Nick when he first encounters Michael O'Hearn. Mike accuses the Indian of being a liar, and he agrees that he is. "Nick great liar," he says. "What of dat? Lie good sometime." (51) Nick frequently provides amusement for the reader by the way he goes about dealing with the white man. During one of his visits the Captain lends him a quarter, which he repays the next day. The Captain is so surprised to get the money back that he engages in a discussion with the Indian on the virtue of his having returned the money. Taking advantage of the good feeling that prevails, Nick asks for a dollar, which he promises to pay back the next day. (136)

Nick is sometimes made the object of amusement, with no permanent ill effects. When the Negro women servants, who are in the habit of bursting out with loud laughter and noisy talk at the slightest provocation, first see Nick and learn his name, they are uncontrollable. "Burst succeeded burst," Cooper says, "until the Indian walked away in offended dignity." (60) Like Mike's insults, the incident is soon forgotten. The women become accustomed to Nick's presence and he to theirs. Looking at Nick from this side of his nature, it is not difficult to see him as a likeable character. In contrast, it would be impossible to imagine angry, malignant Magua or proud Mahtoree forgetting the insults of a white man or of a white man's servants.

Although he was once a warrior to be feared, (70) Nick is not a young man when he appears in the story. At fifty, his physical condition is much less remarkable than that of Mahtoree, and his war paint, like Magua's is applied in such a way as to present a rather shocking appearance. Yet, the reader is left with no feeling of repulsion toward Nick's physical person. This is in part due to his good nature, perhaps. But it is also due to the attitude Cooper takes in his presentation of the Indian's physical appearance. "Lest the reader get an exaggerated notion of Michael's credulity," he comments, concerning Mike's conclusion that painted Nick is a devil, "it may be well to say that Nick had painted a few days before, in a fit of caprice. . . ." (52) There is a noticeable lack of the kind of language used to describe Magua's dark appearance and sly movements. Nick is said to go "loping across the flat at his customary gait. . .," (51) when he goes to meet the Captain. He is often seen at a distance as he comes through the fields toward the Willoughby residence and is admired for his ability to keep such a "pace for hours at a time." (69)

There is little in the story to suggest that Cooper was attempting to show Satanic qualities in the Indian in his use of the term Nick. The sobriquet is bandied about in such a way that it helps provide much of the amusement. Joel Strides, the Captain's overseer, promotes Michael O'Hearn's fear that Nick is "Old Nick," or "one of your Yankee devils," until he sees that the matter is getting out of hand and that he must "undeceive his companion." (52-53) "Mike honestly believed that he had met an American devil," Cooper says, "and it required no little argumentation to persuade him of the contrary." (53) The Captain corrects the cook, who had earlier joined in the uproar over the name and the appearance of the Indian, when she again calls him "Old Nick." "No, only Saucy Nick," (60) he says. When Mike becomes a drinking partner of the Indian, he has only the highest praise for him. "Ye'll mar-r-ch through Ameriky, and never see his aiquel!" he says. "Och! that Nick's a devil, and no har-r-m said!" (391) he declares. At one point in the story he refers to Nick as "Nicholas," (79) a term the Captain also uses on at least one occasion. (433) Because of his ability to keep the secret of Maud Willoughby's real name to himself, Nick is spoken of as a "forest gentlemen." "Had Nick been a pale-face, of the class of those with whom he usually associated, his discovery would have gone through the settlement, with scoffings and exaggerations. . .," (350) Cooper points out. The name the chief would most like to be called, the one he uses when he decides to think and act like a chief rather than rum drinking Nick, is Wyandotté. If the name Nick has any significance other than amusement value, it is that it tends to keep the reader aware that the Indian is not a completely harmless clown.

Nick has weaknesses, of course, but a search for those characteristics that would place him in the same category with Satanic Magua or even in the same category with self-centered, irreverent Mahtoree turns up a rather weak indictment. He "had made himself an outcast from his tribe, more by the excess of ungovernable passions, than from any act of base meanness," (47) Cooper says. His tribe evidently takes somewhat the same view of the matter. He frequently returns to go on the war path. Neither does his passion for drink lead him into serious difficulty with the Captain. There is no evidence that he was ever flogged for drinking. He drinks to his fill each time he visits the "hutted knoll," but never endangers or so much as frightens anyone when he is drunk. At one point Mrs. Willoughby offers him all he can drink if he can give information of her son. "These were not temperance days, when conscience took so firm a stand between the bottle and the lips," (71) Cooper points out. Perhaps Nick's ungovernable passion, coupled with his indebtedness to the Captain and his wife for saving his life, is no more than Cooper's way of getting a first rate warrior and a wise chief into close contact with the residents of the "hutted knoll" over an extended period of time.

A more serious matter is the fact that Nick murders the Captain in a moment of anger, and thus dissolves a loyal relationship of many years. But even this act is understandable and to a great extent defensible. In spite of the flogging during the early years of the friendship and the threats and reminders throughout the course of the story, Nick makes considerable effort to remain loyal. True to his word he locates a choice spot for Willoughby's home, and when the Captain leaves for the winter, he leaves "Sergeant Joyce in garrison, supported by Nick" and some of the others. (23) Nick is one of the first to greet and welcome Mrs. Willoughby when she returns with her husband from Albany in the spring. After some time away from the "hutted knoll," Nick returns, guiding Robert Willoughby to his parent's home. It is Nick who is chosen to guide young Willoughby, a British officer, through hostile country back to Boston after the war has started. Although the Captain expresses some doubt about Nick's loyalty, Nick returns to tell of the Battle of Bunker Hill and of Bob's exploits. When the hut is besieged by American patriots and their

Indian allies, Nick comes with a letter from Bob, who has been captured while out on a truce mission. At this point Nick is confined by the Captain, who becomes more suspicious as the tension mounts. With the aide of Mike he escapes, intending to send Mike back with news of Bob. During the episode, Nick tells Mike, "Nick cap'in friend, but cap'in don't know it--won't believe." (393)

More surprising than the fact that Nick kills the Captain is the fact that he had not done so years before. Persistently Willoughby erodes the chief's pride and his patience. He summons the Indian in the beginning of the story, and almost as soon as Nick arrives, he threatens. "Knave," he says, "do you not know me well enough not to trifle when I am serious." (15) The difficulty is one of communication, and Nick tries patiently to explain. Later, when the "hutted knoll" is threatened and the Captain's temper is short, he again reminds Nick of the floggings. "You will remember, Tuscarora, that I have had you flogged more than once in my day?" (339) he says. At this point Nick gives his warning. "Cap'in ole man," he says. "Got a head like snow on rock. He bold soldier; but he not got wisdom enough for gray hair. Why he put he hand rough, on place whip strike? Wise man nebber do dat." (340) Soon afterward, when Nick and the Captain are alone in the forest, the chief kills the Captain.

Both Mrs. Willoughby and the Reverend Woods warn

Willoughby about his treatment of the Indian. "I hardly think you do Nick justice," the wife tells her husband. Cooper speaks of her at this point as "the right-judging wife." (137) The chaplain is concerned that the Captain has flogged Nick and frequently threatens to do so again. "Does a savage ever forgive a blow?" (70) he asks, when the Captain explains his method of dealing with Nick.

It is doubtful that an attempt to determine who is more at fault, the Captain or the Indian, would be of any real value. Certainly the claim of House and others, as noted in chapter one, that Nick is heartless and evil like Magua is unfounded. Nor is there reason to believe that the Captain is an evil man. He is mistaken in thinking that the kind of discipline he once applied to lower class whites in a military situation will work with an Indian, but his mistake is understandable. Such discipline was common in the military services of most countries of that day. A more rewarding approach would be to seek Cooper's reason for having the Captain provoke the Indian so persistently that Nick must kill him to protect his pride.

Since Cooper entitled his story Wyandotté, it would seem reasonable to assume that the story is Nick's story--that the idyllic pocket of civilization is constructed to enable Cooper to say what he wanted to say about Nick. The fact is that through his contact with the "hutted Knoll" Nick gains something. He establishes a friendship with several members of the microcosm of a civilization and learns not to allow these human relationships to be damaged because of his strong resentment toward Willoughby. He carries through his loyalty to the family, even after he has killed the Captain, by saving the scalps of Bulah and Mrs. Willoughby and the lives of Bob and Maud. It is unlikely that his sense of humor was to be found in the lodges of his fellow warriors or that he would have tolerated any amusement at his own expense when he was a warrior and a chief among his people. To some extent, at least, he feels the guilt of a civilized person for having killed a civilized man, and confesses his deed.

When Nick is converted to Christianity, the chaplain christens him "Nicholas," and "now," the chaplain says, "there is no longer a Wyandotté, or a Saucy Nick." (520) The chaplain would like to believe that there is no longer the rum drinking Indian or the scalping warrior who returns good for good and bad for bad, of course; but just before his death the Indian offers Bob Willoughby his tomahawk so that Bob will have the opportunity to avenge his father's death. Nick can not give up his idea of justice. Willoughby will not take the weapon. "May God in heaven forgive the deed, as I now forgive you," he says. Nick grasps his hand and repeats, "God forgive," and falls dead. (521)

In spite of the fact that the conversion experience is not completely successful, it is clear that Nick has changed. He has gained humility and has attempted, in his own way, to repent. It is also clear that Cooper is advancing the idea that the way to bring two such disparate peoples as the Indian and the white man into harmony is to allow the Indian to profit from white civilization--the white man to offer the opportunity and the Indian to partake of it.

CONCLUSION

That Chingachgook, Uncas and Hard Heart differ markedly from Magua and Mahtoree is not surprising. Like the old trapper and the squatter they are the extremes of good and bad common to romantic fiction. But that three of Cooper's most prominent "bad" Indians prove to be fundamentally different, in spite of the fact that each seems to have been developed from a similar general pattern, is another matter. Particularly noticeable is the shift in viewpoint over a period of a few months from the creation of Magua to that of Mahtoree. The maturing of Natty Bumppo as a social being might suggest a clue to the shift from myth-like Magua to ordinary Mahtoree, except that there is reason to question Natty as the controlling force in the two novels. It is not difficult, as has been demonstrated, to see Magua as at least the equal of Natty; and there is evidence that Cooper originally planned The Prairie without Natty. It was his wife, according to Henry W. Boynton, who "urged him to use Natty Bumppo once more."[1] The demands of each novel might account for Indians with markedly different personalities, but not for Indians who suggest different views toward the nature of the red man.

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[1] James Fenimore Cooper (New York, 1931), p. 137.

Several writers have noted the strong attraction for Cooper of certain irreconcilable notions. According to Henry Nash Smith, Cooper "was at once more strongly devoted to the principle of social order and more vividly responsive to the idea of nature and freedom in the Western forest than" were his contemporaries.[2] Frank Collins notes that Cooper seemed on the one hand to fear that every human being constantly faces an "impulse 'to do wrong without an inducement;'" while on the other he was convinced that evil is the product of social circumstance.[3] Perhaps a clue to the reason for the shift from Magua to Mahtoree to Wyandotté lies in these dichotomies.

In view of his strong interest in "nature and freedom," it is understandable that Cooper's first Indian novel should be a forceful indictment of the white man for his treatment of the Indian and that Magua's satanic evil is the product of social circumstance. But once he had made his indictment, he must have recognized immediately the problem he had uncovered. There was the fact that civilization was spreading over the continent, and there was also the fact that one who believed strongly in "social order" could hardly continue to imply that leaving the forest to the Indian was a desirable solution. It was as if his temper had cooled when he came to write The Prairie. The result was a closer examination of the Indian--a more careful weighing of the opposing notions that he wished to reconcile.

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[2] Virgin Land (New York, 1950), p. 66.

[3] "Cooper and the American Dream," PMLA, LXXXI (March, 1966), 79.

Although Cooper was still concerned, as has been noted, with white abuse of the red man in The Prairie, he was no longer willing to see the Indian's world as complete when uncorrupted by the white man. Whereas Magua is provoked into being evil, Mahtoree is blamed, along with Ishmael Bush, for the strife between the different Indian and white interests in the New Land. That Cooper was consciously weighing the extent of the Indian's responsibility for his own bad nature is evident in a comparison he draws between Mahtoree and Ishmael Bush. Having explained that Mahtoree's evil lies in his selfishness and irreverence for the laws of God and human societies, he says: "These several characteristics will be understood always with reference to the situation of the Indian, though little apology is needed for finding resemblances between men who essentially possess the same nature, however it may be modified by circumstance."[4] At no point is Mahtoree caused to blame the white man for his own bad nature. The significant result for Cooper's changing view toward the Indian is that to judge Mahtoree for choosing to be bad is in essence to raise the Indian to a higher plane than Magua is on. It brings him nearer the white man as a moral being and makes him less the creature of nature. At this point, however, the worlds of the red and the white man remain distinct and apart, and there is no suggestion as to how they might or that they should be molded into one.

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[4] The Prairie: A Tale (New York, 1859), p. 357.

The creation of Nick, sixteen years later, is clear evidence of Cooper's continuing effort to decide the moral worth of the Indian, and again the Indian gains in stature. As noted in Chapter IV, Nick, "the forest gentleman," is placed distinctly above that class of whites "with whom he usually associated." According Nick this position enables Cooper to allow the Indian to profit from white, Christian civilization. It allows Cooper, through the use of the idyllic setting of the novel, to fuse his strong interest in the forest and in social order. Unfortunately, Joel Strides and other lower class whites--those incapable of a high level of social order--interfere with the process and contaminate the paradise. Here Cooper seems convinced, to quote Frank Collins again, that "early 'training' and unrelenting vigilance" are necessary "to keep down the sullen tiger of the aboriginal impulse 'to do wrong without an inducement.'" Joel and his friends have had no such training. Without their presence it is likely that Nick would never have been provoked into killing the Captain, and the two worlds would have been fused into one.

That his hope for a fusion of the world of the Indian and the civilization of the white man was not a passing fancy with Cooper is born out by the fact that his last Indian novels pursue the possibilities of this solution. Susquesus, the leading Indian character in The Redskins, is a step nearer the white, Christian, aristocrat than Nick, and he too is profoundly affected by what he has been told about Christianity. Scalping Peter of Oak Openings undergoes a conversion experience and profits from his contact with white, civilized, Christian people.

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[5] James Fenimore Cooper, The Redskins: or, Indian and Injin (New York, 1860), p. 470.

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