

TWO DEMISES IN THE LEATHERSTOCKING TALES: CHINGACHOOK'S AND NATHANIEL BUMPPO'S

Hiroshi TAKAHASHI

The best way to grasp what message an author intends to convey is to hear what he himself says about what he has produced; his word is law. The law ruling the literary context of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* may be said to be the "Preface to The Leather-Stocking Tales" attached to *The Deerslayer*, which students of this gargantuan maestro of the early nineteenth-century American literature should repeatedly refer to so as to avoid swerving from the intended direction. The best route, for example, leading to a true understanding of the identity of Natty Bumppo should be to find out and quote what Cooper himself suggests in the "Preface" mentioned above. In not a few Japanese books on the history of American literature this frontiersman has been called a "noble savage,"¹⁾ the sobriquet denoting the consummation of an Indian image idealized mostly by European Romanticists since the eighteenth century. Professor Ryoichi Okada asserts that Natty's life is virtually almost completely detached from the white men's.²⁾ What is more, the professor also claims that the inscription added by Middleton to Natty's gravestone, "May no wanton hand ever disturb his remains," shows the definite severance of relations between Natty's spirit and the other white people's because the "wanton hand" should be nothing less than the white man's hand willing to destroy nature and dispossess land.³⁾ The question is whether Natty has been wholly separated from civilization to become a full-fledged "savage." Cooper suggests in the "Preface to The Leather-Stocking Tales" that had the early impressions not been sustained by continued, though casual, connexion with men of his own color, if not of his own caste, all the information goes to show he would soon have lost every trace of his origin. Natty is, the author adds, too proud of his origin to sink into the condition of the wild Indian.⁴⁾ It is far from difficult to get the idea that the author never intended Natty to be submerged in savagism of Indian society; he allowed the hero to keep refusing to become a savage, thus abandoning no civilized associates, much less his own Christian identity. To assume that Cooper's intention might be to present a maverick Christian completely separated from civilization and assimilated to savagism would be a misleading concept, likely to reduce much of the glamour emanating from one of the

most significant archetypes in the myth of a "runaway male" in the beginning of the history of American fiction.

It may be widely accepted that the Leatherstocking Tales should be divided into two groups: one including *The Pioneers*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *The Prairie*, and the other *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer*. Although it can be noticed that in the later tales Cooper apparently bestowed his favor on the energy of rising generations of the frontier folk heroes, the motifs in the earlier series seem to converge on his pervasive theme of nostalgia for the vanished or vanishing races of natural men, both Christian and heathen. Sympathetic characterization has succeeded in producing two prototypes of vanishing or fleeing male images in *The Pioneers*: Chingachgook who dies as the last survivor of the Mohegans and Natty Bumppo who goes far towards the setting sun, condemning his fellow whites' high-handed enforcement of civil law and wasteful ways of destroying natural resources. The title of *The Last of the Mohicans* has in itself an echo of nostalgic lament over a vanishing Indian tribe, whose chief's young son is laid in his mound amid deep mourning by the Delaware Mohicans. And in *The Prairie* Natty the trapper prefers the life and death away from civilization in the Pawnee village with an adopted Indian son to those in the civilized settlements, where he was invited by the young people to make comfortable his last days. It is noteworthy that in these impressionable situations Chingachgook is adamant in showing off his original traits and dying as a proud Indian despite his accepted Christian name "John," just as Natty insists on dying as a Christian among the mostly Indian attendants. The main motif common in these situations is maintenance of one's own identity, or rejection of converted identity, among the different-colored people. Glory of Natty Bumppo, and of Chingachgook as well, lies in pertinacity to keep up his own potentially effaceable origin to the last.

It is of interest to notice that the death scenes of the two chief characters are parallel to each other in dramatic settings. As has been mentioned earlier, each of the two wishes to die according to his own fashion and go to the heaven of his own people. When Indian John was found by Elizabeth seated on the trunk of a fallen oak, his blanket had fallen from his shoulders, leaving his breast, arms, and most of his body bare. The medallion of Washington reposed on his chest. The long black hair was plaited on his head, falling away, so as to expose his high forehead and piercing eyes. In the enormous incisions of his ears were entwined ornaments of silver, beads, and porcupine's

quills, mingled in a rude taste, and after the Indian fashions. A large drop, composed of similar materials, was suspended from the cartilage of his nose, and, falling below his lips, rested on his chin. Streaks of red paint crossed his wrinkled brow, and were traced down his cheeks, with such variations in the lines as caprice or custom suggested. His body was also coloured in the same manner; the whole exhibiting an Indian warrior prepared for some event of more than usual moment.⁵⁾ The Mohegan chief is completely prepared for his departure to the Indians' heaven where the Great Spirit of savages rules. "My fathers say, from the far-off land, come," says he to Natty Bumppo. "My women, my young warriors, my tribe, say, come. The Great Spirit says, come. Let Mohegan die" (p.422). He bids good-bye to Natty, "Hawk-eye! my fathers call me to the happy hunting-grounds. The path is clear, and the eyes of Mohegan grow young. I look—but I see no white-skins; there are none to be seen but just and brave Indians. Farewell, Hawk-eye—you shall go with the Fire-eater and the Young-eagle, to the white man's heaven; but I go after my fathers" (p.427). Natty says to Mr. Grant that Indian John "trusts only to the Great Spirit of the savages" (p.428). Despite the Christian name "John" given to him and a Christian minister, Mr. Grant, attending eager to help him to trust his salvation to the Rock of ages, Indian John would not listen to the minister; Natty suggests that Mr. Grant will make nothing of the Indian, who has not seen a Moravian priest since the war so that it is hard to keep them from going back to their native ways. Natty advises that it would be as well to let the old man pass in peace (p.427).

As for Nathaniel Bumppo, for that matter, whose death scene is one of the most memorable in *The Prairie*, the last of the earlier series, he declares to his adopted Indian son just before dying, "Pawnee, I die, as I have lived, a christian man," although Hard-Heart, the son, offers consolation and promise of an Indian fashion of funeral, saying, "A hundred Loups shall clear his path from briars."⁶⁾ Natty adds that he is going to stand in the Presence of the Great Spirit of his people, and that He knows his colour and will judge his deeds according to his gifts (p.1311). Here Le Balafre, the old Pawnee chief, is given the role of the minister, and seated nigh the dying trapper, he arises to announce the termination of the scene to the tribe when the trapper dies: "A valiant, a just, and a wise warrior has gone on the path which will lead him to the blessed grounds of his people! When the voice of the Wahcondah called him, he was ready to answer. GO: my children; remember the just chiefs of the Pale-faces, and clear your own tracks from briars" (p.1317). The announcement suggests that there are two heavens: the white man's

heaven and the savage's, to reach which, Le Balafre advises, the Loups must clear their own tracks from briars. The declaration makes us feel that something of disconnection in spirit seems to exist between the differently colored races despite pervasion of the deeply sympathetic atmosphere among the largely Indian gathering.

It is no wonder that Cooper had a racist propensity which gave the hero in the *Leatherstocking Tales* some segregative traits, including repugnance to mixed blood and repudiation of reunion with different-colored people in heaven. The concept of different heavens for different-colored races is suggestive of persistent racial segregation in American society, as well as in American fiction. Abhorrence of mixed blood must have long since resulted from the Christian dogmatic efforts to prevent the purity of the Christian blood from being contaminated by the blood of heathens; even a most ignorant heathen knows that the Jews had long been prohibited by edicts from getting married to Christians, because they were considered by the church and its followers to be the enemies of God, the Christ-killers, the revilers of the Virgin, and the associates of Satan.⁷⁾ No one can forget that the Jew-hatred has often led to ruthless inquisition, persecution, and massacre. Indian-hatred has also come out of the same root of Christian doctrines, which prompted earlier missionaries to regard the native Americans as associates of the devil.

Some contrasting situations have been introduced to direct attention to the different aspects of the custom at the deathbed. In *The Pioneers* Chingachgook sings, using his own language, in low, guttural tones, "I will come! I will come! to the land of the just I will come. The Maquas I have slain!—I have slain the Maquas!" and then in a low, distinct voice he speaks his own praise, not the Redeemer's praise, "Who can say that the Maquas know the back of Mohegan! What enemy that trusted in him did not see the morning? What Mingo that he chased ever sung the song of triumph? Did Mohegan ever lie? No; the truth lived in him, and none else could come out of him. In his youth, he was a warrior, and his moccasins left the stain of blood. In his age, he was wise; his words at the council fire did not blow away with the winds" (p. 426). In *The Prairie*, however, when he is asked by his adopted son to tell the young people how many Mingos he has struck, and what acts of valor and justice he has done, the old trapper rejects the request, saying, "A boastful tongue is not heard in the heaven of a white man! ... No, my son; a pale-face may not sing his own praises, and hope to have them acceptable before his God!" (p. 1312) By which the young partisan is a little disappointed

and steps back.

Another contrast in the attitudes at the deathbed is that while Chingachgook asks Hawk-eye to let the bow, tomahawk, pipe, and wampum of the Mohegan be laid in his mound (p. 427), Nathaniel Bumppo says to Hard-Heart, "Horses and arms are not needed to stand in the Presence of the Great Spirit of my people!" (p. 1311) A pacifistic emphasis is laid on the person of the trapper who is going to die a Christian.

Setting up a stone at the head of the grave is one of the white fashions and usages; Indian mounds originally have no gravestones on them. However, after the body of Chingachgook has been laid in the grave, Edward Effingham, a young companion of the Indian's, favors him by erecting a stone on the grave according to the Christian fashion. The practice seems to have been intended to produce something of ironical pathos on the part of the last Mohegan chief. The inscription given on the stone by Effingham reads: "This stone is raised to the memory of an Indian Chief, of the Delaware tribe, who was known by the several names of John Mohegan; Mohican; and Chingachgook. He was the last of his people who continued to inhabit this country; and it may be said of him, that his faults were those of an Indian, and his virtues those of a man" (p. 460). Attention may be drawn to four points. First, the Indian chief was known by three names, which implies that he existed as three entities, for himself and for others. The settlers had taken the liberties of uniting, according to Christian custom, his baptismal with his national name. "John," as some critic puts it, is the victim of the white man's brew, and unnaturally restricted by a culture that is not his own.⁸⁾ Second, his original name is misspelled: "Chingagook" should be corrected to "Chingachgook." The error is pointed out by Natty Bumppo who is listening to Effingham reading aloud the inscription for the illiterate Leatherstocking. The old man tells the young man that an Indian's name should not be slighted because it has always some meaning in it: "Big-Serpent" in this case. Third, it is pathetically declared that he is the last survivor of his race. The fact will be dealt with later. Fourth, his Indian identity is blamed for his faults, and not credited with his virtues. That seems to point to the white man's belief that the Indian moral standard should be regarded as lower than a man's, that is, a white man's. The belief, of course, has been derived from Effingham's way of thinking based on white supremacy, but it may be that the author's own bias has been reflected on the statement.

As has already been explained above, Chingachgook had no influence on the design of his own gravestone. Nathaniel Bumppo, on the other hand, is able to manage to have Middleton, the grandson of his old friend whom he

had known in the days of the French and Indian wars, promise that his desire concerning the inscription on the stone shall be done. He wishes the young attendant to put no boastful words on it, but just the name, the age, and the time of the death, with something from the holy book; he says he needs no more (p. 1315). After his body has been interred beneath the shade of some noble oaks, the gravestone is put up in due time by Middleton. It is of some interest that Middleton has taken the liberty of adding the words: "May no wanton hand ever disturb his remains" (p. 1317). Prof. Okada asserts, as has already been mentioned earlier, that the addition above shows the definite disconnection of spirits between Natty Bumppo and civilized society. I cannot agree. For one thing, the wording is too conventional a phrase to put forth any aggressive avowal. For another, it is Middleton, not Natty himself, that has added the prayer. The old trapper has nothing to do with the categorical manifesto, if it could be called so. Does it not suffice to say that the added sentence only implies that the dead man should be given unmarred peace and rest for ever? The author has provided information that the grave is often shown by the Pawnees of the Loup to the traveller and the trader as a spot where a just white-man sleeps (p. 1317). The traveller and the trader mentioned here look like white people. Must we imagine that a just white-man who sleeps here keeps rebuffing any white Christian coming in that direction? Must we accept that the man sleeping under that inscription is such a bigoted anti-civilizational "savage" after all? We would say no.

Both the backwoodsmen are destined to leave no blood-related offspring behind; Chingachgook, as has often been reiterated, is the last man of his race, with his wife and children all deceased, and Nathaniel Bumppo has never got married. Each of the two men of nature laments over the potential loss of his own family/race. Indian John, in *The Pioneers*, bewails the white man's intrusion, looking at the canister of powder in his hand, which Elizabeth Temple has brought at Natty's request and asked John to see it delivered. "This is the great enemy of my nation," he says. "Without this, when could the white men drive the Delawares! Daughter, the Great Spirit gave your fathers to know how to make guns and powder, that they might sweep the Indians from the land. There will soon be no red-skin in the country. When John has gone, the last will leave these hills, and his family will be dead" (p. 409). The speech delivered by a symbolic figure representing the vanishing tribe before Elizabeth, who seems entitled to represent the white race, sounds like one of the most crucial messages Cooper wished to convey in the novel. The author was apparently impressed by the potential perishability of some

Indian races, including the Mohegans. In *The Prairie* also Natty who is nearing his end answers to the enquiry of Middleton who has encouraged him to express his wishes, "I am without kith or kin in the wide world! When I am gone there will be an end of my race" (p.1314). An amusing, and a bit confusing, problem is what the author desired to imply by the word "race." There is a possibility that it would mean the white race. But it would be far from easy to assume that Natty, an old wretch coming to his demise away from civilization surrounded by a largely Indian assembly, might be fully representative of civilized society which is supposed to perish. It is by comparing Natty's catastrophe with Chingachgook's that we could be enlightened about what nuance of meaning the word was intended to contain. As has been introduced above, the Indian chief grieves that his "family" will be dead when he has gone. The old trapper complains that there will be an end of his "race" when he is gone. What is the difference between "family" and "race"? It seems safe to say that both the words contain almost the same tinge of meaning. It would be more convincingly reasonable if the two words would have been traded.

To be sure, Indian John is symbolic of the loss of an Indian tribe, having no one to succeed him. Yet, it is worthy of note that he has established a self-made seeming father-son relationship with Edward Effingham. The relation is one of the subtle devices to create suspicion in the young ladies interested in him that he might have Indian blood. John gives Elizabeth an important, yet misleading, hint concerning Effingham's identity, saying, "Fathers! sons! all gone—all gone! I have no son but the Young Eagle, and he has the blood of a white man" (pp.409-410). Young Eagle is the moniker given to Effingham. The information immediately stirs up powerful interest in the listener, who asks, "Who is Mr. Edwards? Why are you fond of him, and whence does he come?" (p.410) (Edward Oliver Effingham has called himself Oliver Edwards until he reveals his true name at the end.) The word "son" is a common appellation applied to call the younger generation in Indian society. Chingachgook does not regard Effingham either as a blood-related son or as an adopted son, but as a precious young friend. The suspicion and suspense related to the young man's blood are effectively enhanced to lead to a happy-ending denouement of the young couple: Elizabeth Temple and Edward Oliver Effingham. It must also be remembered that it is young Effingham who sets up a gravestone for Indian John. I would say that a father-son relationship in spirit has existed between the Mohegan chief and the young white man.

In *The Prairie* Natty adopts Hard-Heart, a valiant young Pawnee Indian,

as his son. The deed seems to show the determination to sink into savagism. The fact is, the trapper tries to make his adopted son respect his Christian principles. The old man gives the son a blessing, "May the God of a white man look on your deeds with friendly eyes" (p.1313). Concerning the heaven, however, the old man does not seem to know whether they will ever meet again there, confessing, "There are many traditions concerning the place of good Spirits. ... You believe in the blessed Prairies, and I have faith in the sayings of my fathers. If both are true, our parting will be final; but if it should prove that the same meaning is hid under different words, we shall yet stand together, Pawnee, before the face of your Wahcondah who will then be no other than my God" (p.1313). The chance that both father and son will meet again in heaven is apparently very slender, for the possibility is barely sustained by the subjunctive mood—"if it *should* prove." Cooper's segregative prejudice must have caused the father to hesitate to assure his savage son that they can certainly see each other again in the one and the same place of the Good Spirit. If it is difficult for both father and son to meet again in the same heaven, why, we are tempted to ask, has the father adopted a Pawnee son? It may be that if the author had allowed the adopted Indian son to enter the white man's paradise, he would have been laid open to querulous criticism.

The conclusion is that Nathaniel Bumppo can never be said to have become a "noble savage" despite his close approach to savagism even by affiliation, just as Chingachgook can never be regarded as a devout Christian despite his acceptance of a baptismal name. Precariously polarizing stances of both white-skin and red-skin can be well assessed by comparing their deathbed scenes. Both the noble men of nature, Christian and savage, stand just on the same spot in the sense that they have never sold out their true inner souls at the last moment in the different-colored company, to which, though, they have exerted all possible efforts to assimilate themselves. (29/9/1989)

Notes

- 1) 関西学院大学アメリカ研究会『アメリカ——その夢と現実——』（啓文社，1987），p.212. / 大橋吉之輔『アメリカ文学史入門』（研究社，1987），p.53. / 朱牟田夏雄編『講座英米文学史』（大修館書店，1984），第9巻，p.219. / 尾形敏彦編『アメリカ文学の自己発見——十九世紀までのアメリカ文学——』（山口書店，1981），p.88. / 横沢四郎他編『概説アメリカ文学史』（金星堂，1981），p.32. / 大橋健三郎他編『総説アメリカ文学史』（研究社，1975），p.63.
- 2) 岡田量一『『革脚絆物語』と父性』『英語青年』第134巻，第9号（Dec.1988），p.496.
- 3) *Ibid.*
- 4) "Preface to The Leather-Stocking Tales," *The Deerslayer in Cooper: The Leather-*

stocking Tales, Volume II (The Library of America, 1985), pp. 490-491.

- 5) *The Pioneers in Cooper: The Leatherstocking Tales, Volume I* (The Library of America, 1985), p. 406. Subsequent page references in the text are all to this edition.
- 6) *The Prairie in Cooper: The Leatherstocking Tales, Volume II*, p. 1311. Subsequent page references are all to this edition.
- 7) *The Encyclopedia Americana*, International Edition (Danbury, Conn.: Grolier Incorporated, 1988), Vol. 16, pp. 77-78.
- 8) Lester H. Cohen, "What's in a Name?: The Presence of the Victim in *The Pioneers*," *Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 16, pp. 691-692.