AN ANALYSIS OF THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN COOPER'S LEATHER-STOCKING TALES

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

BOWLING GREEN, OHIO

February, 1960

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CHAPTER I

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF STUDY

The Leather-Stocking Tales by James Fenimore Cooper are histories of the experiences and adventures of the venerable frontiersman Natty Bumppo. They cover a series of events which occur from 1740 to about 1805. Bumppo, called at various times Hawkeye, Deerslayer, Leather-Stocking or Pathfinder, takes part in the growth of the United States from its days of French and British warfare until the movement westward. In each of these tales, Natty is called upon to defend, protect, or rescue some "female." These women, whom Cooper has portrayed in his novels, have been the subject of a great deal of criticism.

Inasmuch as most of the criticism of the women varies widely, and shows more breadth than depth of thought, it would appear that a further consideration of them is desirable. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to:
(1) examine the major areas of criticism of Cooper's women,
(2) determine whether the criticism is justified, and
(3) consider the women carefully and individually within the scope of The Leather-Stocking Tales.

The investigation of the subject will be confined to those novels included under the title of The Leather-Stocking Tales, which are The Pioneers, The Last of the Mohicans, The

Prairie, The Pathfinder, and The Deerslayer. It is believed that the subject can be adequately discussed under the limits of these five novels, since they are the most widely read of the author's works and since the bulk of the criticism of his women seems to be based upon them. Cooper himself was fond of each of the Tales individually and believed that each had its merits. He was also convinced that if everlasting fame was to be his lot, it would come to him through The Leather-Stocking Tales. He quite plainly states:

> If anything from the pen of the writer of these romances is at all to outlive himself, it is, unquestionable, the series of The Leather-Stocking Tales. To say this, is not to predict a very lasting reputation for the series itself, but simply to express the belief it will outlast any, or all, of the works from the same hand.1

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[1]James Fenimore Cooper, The Deerslayer (Vol. I of The Complete Works of J. Fenimore Cooper. 32 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1895-1900), p. iv.

NOTE: The above edition is the basic text used in the study, and all future references to any novel of The Leather-Stocking Tales will be to this edition.

CHAPTER II

THE MAJOR AREAS OF CRITICISM OF COOPER'S WOMEN

Although adverse criticism has been constantly aimed at Cooper and his works and directed at everything from his style to his characters, one of the most frequent subjects for attack is his "females." There seems to be a general consensus of opinion that Cooper's heroines tend to be types and caricatures rather than individuals. Mark Twain, in his classic criticism, said that it was difficult to tell the difference between the live people and the corpses in Cooper's novels.[1] And James Russell Lowell in his "A Fable for Critics" contended that

> . . . the women he draws from one
> model don't vary,
> All sappy as maples and flat as
> a prairie.2

One critic complained of "the lackadaisical ladylikeness" of Cooper's heroines;[3] another called them "wooden dolls dressed like a figure of fun and unfit to be thrust to the front of

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[1]Samuel L. Clemens, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences," North American Review, CLXI (July, 1895), p. 2.

[2]James Russell Lowell, The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1848), p. 137.

[3]Lucy Lodkwood Hazard, The Frontier in American Literature (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1941), p. 100.

the stage."[4]

Cooper's British contemporaries were more divided in their criticism of his romances and his women. Many thought "the skill with which the characters are drawn and developed, is where the author's talents have been the most strikingly successful."[5] In direct opposition to this view were those who said of Cooper's romances:

> Their prevailing defect is in their dramatis personae. . . .They have no moral characteristics, and their physical peculiarities, aided by costume and artificial manners, shew them like men in a masquerade.[6]

Another contradictory view of Cooper's merits was offered to the public in 1831 and 1832 by Colburn's and Tait's Edinburgh Magazine respectively. The critic of Colburn's in sketching Cooper's characteristics said:

> . . .as it is difficult to select instances from the cloud of creatures, - composed alike of the high and the humble, the stern-featured and the humorous, - that comes floating upon our recollection, we would instance a whole class, and refer to the refined power and delicacy which he has displayed in his delineation of the female character. There is at times . . .an almost Shakesperian subtlety of perception in his female characters - a majesty, and yet a gentleness, not unworthy of the highest mind, while contemplating the holiest objects that Nature has

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[4]Brander Matthews, "Fenimore Cooper," Atlantic Monthly, C (September, 1907), p. 333.

[5]William B. Cairns, British Criticisms of American Writings, 1815-1833 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1922), p. 126, citing Literary Gazette, X (April, 1826), p. 198.

[6]Ibid., p. 127, citing Monthly Review, V (July, 1827), p. 246.

fashioned.[7]

The reviewer in Tait's, while listing Cooper's virtues and vices, said of his women:

> Still more unlucky are his attempts to portray the female character in its loveliness. His sense seems dead. There is not one of his lovely women - always excepting "the Wept of Wish-ton-Wish," who is not positively repulsive.[8]

The reasons given for Cooper's presumed weakness in delineating feminine character are many and cover virtually every possibility open to inspection. There is some feeling that Cooper could not adequately portray women because his own personal experience with them was limited.[9] It is argued that since he had spent most of his younger years at Yale and then at sea, the opportunities to spend time in the company of the opposite sex were few. Cooper's marriage into the aristocratic DeLancey family only tended to reinforce any conception of the traditional genteel female that may have been slowly forming in his mind. In his American Democrat which was published in 1838, Cooper indicates rather clearly that he believed it was best to exclude women from politics and affairs outside of the home.

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[7]Cairns, p. 153, citing Colburn's, XXXI (1831), p. 356.

[8]Ibid., p. 157, citing Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, I (September, 1832), p. 660.

[9]W. C. Brownell, "Cooper," Scribner's Magazine, XXXIX (April, 1906), p. 465.

"Society is greatly the gainer" because women are "best adapted to give a tone to its domestic happiness."[10]

Some critics seem to feel that Cooper was merely following the romantic ideals of his day, which demanded that women be members of the background and not prominent figures. The period of the emancipation of women had not yet arrived; therefore they had few or no rights. The women of Cooper's time were much more reliant on their men and were generally regarded as being dependent and inferior.[11] They were viewed more for their beauty and the pleasure they gave. Thus, the critics maintain, the events of which Cooper wrote did not lend themselves readily to the weaker sex; therefore the latter could play but a small role. "It is to be remembered also that women must ever play a minor part in the tale of adventure, since the bolder experiences in life are not fit for gentle and clinging heroines."[12] It seems then, that to many critics Cooper was just following the model of his generation.

Another prominent complaint is that Cooper went to the oldest traditions of fiction and borrowed the fine lady or the elegant female. Therefore, his women are young and

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[10]James Fenimore Cooper, The American Democrat (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1956), p. 42.

[11]Percy H. Boynton, Literature and American Life (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1936), p. 267.

[12]Matthews, p. 334.

[13]Lillie Deming Lashe, The Early American Novel, 1789-1830 (reprint, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1958), p. 86.

beautiful, noble and virtuous, and follow a pattern of stilted decorum rather than becoming human and individual. Canby says that Cooper's ladies are "accoutred with such delicacy, such oppressive refinement, and so many attributes of modesty and reticence as to pass out of the realm of romance into sheer comedy."[14] Lounsbury also feels that the elements of modesty and gentility are carried to such an extreme as to create more of an atmosphere of humor than character. He says of one heroine that "on one occasion her little foot moved," despite the fact that "she had been carefully taught too that even this beautiful portion of the female frame should be quiet and unobtrusive."[15] If Cooper's women were all really this genteel, they might well be considered better to live with than to die for.

William Dean Howells in his Heroines of Fiction felt that Cooper was not able to develop his women simply because he drew them romantically.[16] According to Howells, the heroine of a romantic novel, such as those of Cooper, rarely becomes an individual character to the reader simply because she seldom exists at all. The "ever-womanly" will not lend

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[14]Henry Seidel Canby, Classic Americans (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1931), p. 129.

[15]Thomas R. Lounsbury as quoted in A Reader's History of American Literature by Thomas W. Higginson and Henry Walcott Boynton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1903), p. 97.

[16]William Dean Howells, Heroines of Fiction (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1903), p. 112.

herself readily to anyone who "proposes anything but truth to nature," for she feels she cannot trust him. It is only when the artist attempts to portray her likeness realistically and faithfully that she will allow herself to be painted, Howells insisted. Romance, in general, does not really need the feminine element. When in a story of adventure, as Cooper writes, woman must play a subordinate part, she inevitably is reduced to a type. Thus Howells placed the blame for the weakness he found in Cooper's women on the kind of novels Cooper was writing, not the manner in which he wrote them.

Still another reason given for the continued "woodiness" and conventionality of Cooper's heroines by those who find them so is simply that Cooper, like any normal author, adhered to a winning formula. He repeated his successes and scrapped his failures.[17] When his first novel, Precaution, was mistaken for the work of another author and criticized for its stiffness, Cooper discarded that pattern and began his romances of the American frontier. The popularity of The Spy and The Pioneers proved to him that he had chosen a sound basis on which to build.

However accurate the criticism of Cooper's women may be, still no blanket condemnation or appraisal of them would be truthful and just without actual study of the works. The

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[17]Loshe, p. 86.

women are involved in many different situations and circumstances throughout The Leather-Stocking Tales, and it is necessary to consider carefully the actions and reactions of each of them before determining if they are from the same or similar patterns. Not only must each heroine be treated individually, but Cooper himself must be judged on the basis of how well he did what he seems to have attempted to do, and not on how well he conforms to the standards of modern fiction.

CHAPTER III

THE PIONEERS

In The Pioneers, published in 1823 as the first of the series chronologically, Cooper began his pattern of using two contrasting heroines, a practice which he continued throughout The Leather-Stocking Tales with the exception of The Pathfinder. Elizabeth Temple is the vivacious brunette and Louisa Grant is the languid blonde. Elizabeth has dark ringlets like a raven's wing. She is clear-skinned and beautiful with a "Grecian nose" and "a mouth made for love."[1] Her full and rounded figure is filled with female grace and womanly dignity. Everything about her speaks of the socially conventional woman whose only purpose is to be attractive and sympathetic.

Elizabeth has received her education and religious training in the "metropolis" and therefore is a civilized heroine dropped into frontier life. Her advantages have not made her haughty, but instead have made her aware of the beauties of this new land and the pleasantness of the village of Templeton. She is well mannered and adjusts easily to her father's home and friends.

Her sense of humor brightens her character considerably and adds to her vividness. She can almost always find an

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[1]The Pioneers, p. 56.

opportunity for jests and laughter. She jokes with her father, Marmaduke Temple, about missing the deer with his shot while hunting and mildly puts him to shame.[2] She finds the sight of Richard, her cousin, peering from an upstairs window with his head clad in a nightcap, funny to the point of broad laughter.[3] Elizabeth's happy ways and genuine personality make her the friend of all immediately.

However, Cooper did not neglect the maidenly modesty of his heroine. Continually throughout the novel Elizabeth blushes whenever she comes in contact with Oliver Edwards. After she and her father have taken the wounded lad to their home and had the bullet removed from his shoulder, Elizabeth feels a growing affection toward Oliver which causes her lady-like embarrassment. When she offers him the turkey from the turkey-shoot as a peace-offering, a flush again covers her forehead and cheeks.[4] And later when young Edwards is dismissed from the home of Judge Temple, Elizabeth begins to realize just how much she does care for him. But as a proper lady and as a member of the genteel school, she must wait until Edwards shows some sign of his feelings for her before she can release her emotions to him.

Besides having the conventional characteristics of

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[2]The Pioneers, p. 27.

[3]Ibid., p. 179.

[4]Ibid., p. 200.

beauty, modesty, and gentility, Elizabeth has the power to sympathize with others. She understands clearly Natty's dilemma. She can see his concern about the receding forest and she respects the privacy which he demands. Civilization is closing in on Bumppo, and Elizabeth and Judge Temple are part of it. When her father imprisons the old scout for killing a deer out of season, she pleads with the judge to release him.

> "Surely, sir, those laws that condemn a man like the Leather-Stocking to so severe a punishment, for an offence that even I must think very venial, cannot be perfect in themselves."[5]

Elizabeth seems to reject her father's ideas because she does not understand them. Judge Temple, although a dear friend of Bumppo, realizes that in a civilized society there are laws to be kept and that anyone who breaks these laws must be punished. Elizabeth, like Natty, fails to see the importance of enforcing laws so insignificant and therefore seems to reject civilization somewhat. With these characteristics Elizabeth's conventionality ceases and she becomes a daughter of the frontier. Cooper exerts the influence of the border upon her and makes the contrast between her and Louisa considerably greater.

Louisa, even more than Elizabeth is the conventional, weak, helpless, clinging female. She is light, fragile, pale

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[5]The Pioneers, p. 396.

and tires easily. Although she is well educated, she does not have the cosmopolitan air of Elizabeth, for she has seldom left the village. The quiet Christian-like Louisa is prone to tears and faints away at the slightest opportunity. This usually leaves Elizabeth in the role of nurse and mother to the slight creature.

Soon after the arrival of Elizabeth in the village, Marmaduke Temple gets together a group to go riding. Elizabeth shows a rare ability to handle a horse and even forces it to leap a broad gap in the bridge, a feat which amazes and terrifies her father.[6] This is hardly a trick which the conventional woman with no self-reliance would perform. Instead the helpless female would probably do as Louisa, who had a gentleman ride beside her and help her onto the horse. On the trip back to the village a tree falls across the road and nearly strikes the group of riders. Elizabeth only presses her hands to her face in a slight gesture of fear and relief, but Louisa is so terrified that she loses her strength and falls from the saddle.[7]

That Louisa is closer to a purely conventional heroine while Elizabeth shows the influence of the hardy frontier life to which she has adapted herself, can best be seen by the episode with the wild panther. The two girls often take walks

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[6]The Pioneers, p. 235.

[7]Ibid., p. 244.

around the countryside but decline the offer of protection which is usually forthcoming from Oliver. They little realize the possible dangers into which they can fall. While on one of these jaunts, the girls are attacked by a wild panther.[8] The natural impulse is to run and that is what Elizabeth attempts to do, but Louisa has already fainted. Here was Cooper's opportunity to show the impact of the frontier influence. In the ordinary situations of The Pioneers, Elizabeth may be merely a thing of beauty and modesty, but in a time of stress such as this, she shows heroic powers of strength and endurance. Instead of deserting Louisa and leaving her to her fate, Elizabeth returns, puts Louisa's head on her lap and calmly watches the dog battle the panther.[9] Elizabeth is helpless, but not helpless in the same sense that Louisa is. The courage shown in the face of danger by Elizabeth releases her from the bond of conventionality somewhat and makes her a daughter of the frontier.

Elizabeth is quick witted, daring, and willing to take some initiative. When Natty and his friend Benjamin attempt their escape from jail, it is with Elizabeth's help that the plan is successful. She quickly improvises a scheme for concealing Benjamin and getting him away from

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[8]The Pioneers, p. 315.

[9]Ibid., p. 316.

the village.[10] She takes charge and gives the orders when Edwards and Natty become confused. This dependence of the male on the female is directly opposite to the conventional code of behavior and makes Elizabeth a unique figure among Cooper's women.

When Elizabeth and Louisa set out to climb the hill and take to Natty the gunpowder he has requested, Louisa becomes terrified at the thought of encountering a wild animal again. Elizabeth has no fear of this issue, but she is sensitive about climbing the slope and going alone into the presence of several men. Within Elizabeth, conventional behavior and frontier influence are struggling for supremacy. She finally overcomes her womanly modesty in favor of fulfilling Natty's request and starts off through the forest alone, leaving the frightened Louisa at the edge of the wooded area.[11]

Upon arriving at the spot previously designated by Leather-Stocking, Elizabeth scarcely has time to recognize Indian John and Oliver before they find themselves in the middle of a forest fire. Once again her inner strength calms her and she quietly awaits a fiery death. She does not turn pale and sink to the ground as one might expect of Louisa. Instead, Elizabeth is more concerned with saving old Indian

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[10] The Pioneers, p. 408.

[11] Ibid., p. 413.

John from the flames.

There is a reversion to conventional modesty when Elizabeth not only refuses to discard her highly flammable dress, but will not even lift it up far enough to permit free movement of her feet. She wants to escape from the blazing inferno, but she would rather risk the flames than exhibit her maidenly ankles.[12] Again there appears to be a struggle between modesty and the influence of the new land.

In The Pioneers there appears one other feminine character whom, although of minor importance, Cooper handled very successfully. In fact, he seemed to grant her greater freedom than he did his heroines. Remarkable Pettibone, the inquisitive and resentful housekeeper of Judge Temple, is something of a Yankee spinster and an English shrew.[13] She is a "gabber" and runs around cackling constantly about little nothings. Her name suggests that she is of Puritan origin, and since Cooper did not particularly care for this sect, he may have been gently making fun of them through her.

With the arrival of Elizabeth, Remarkable's rule over the Temple household is broken. This stirs Remarkable's temper and several times she tries to work her courage to the point where she can at least bring the issue to a climax.

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[12] The Pioneers, p. 429.

[13] Dorothy Yast Deegan, The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels (New York: King's Crown Press, 1951), p. 131.

She often thinks of speaking back and telling her young mistress to do some of the trivial tasks herself that she asks the servants to do, but Remarkable's prudence gets the better of her resentment and she finally resigns herself to obedience.[14]

In The Pioneers Cooper revealed at some length three feminine characters. Two of them are heroines, the other a minor figure; yet all three are quite different. Louisa Grant is a conventional heroine who justifies quite clearly the critics' cry of "weak" and "helpless." Elizabeth Temple is a heroine that Cooper judged on the basis of the frontier, and thus she has a combination of the qualities of the gentility and the qualities of the border country. She is certainly the best drawn female of the novel and deserving of some praise for her contrast in personality. Remarkable Pettibone, though seen only slightly, has several of the vices which Cooper probably would not have allowed to go into the character of his heroines. Because of these "evils" she becomes much more interesting and perhaps better delineated than Louisa.

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[14]The Pioneers, p. 168.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS

The two "lovely beings" of The Last of the Mohicans (1826) resemble quite closely the two heroines of The Pioneers. The vivacious brunette and the languid blonde are again present. Alice Munro is young looking and light complexioned with golden hair and blue eyes. Cora Munroe is also young but seems much older. Her figure is rounded and more mature. Her hair is shining black and her complexion, though not brown, is very dark as if her veins are filled with rich blood. She is both dignified and beautiful.[1] But while Alice and Cora do resemble Louisa and Elizabeth, they appear to be drawn much stronger and more clearly. The frontier was even more dangerous during the French and Indian Wars and therefore offered many thrilling episodes on which to base a judgment of strength and clarity in their characters.

Alice, like Louisa of The Pioneers, is a perfect example of what the critics call "the fainting, timid female." Cora, like Elizabeth Temple, shows the influence of the rugged frontier life and reveals some characteristics planted there which make her a more complex figure.

There are a few occasions when Cora shows that

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[1]The Last of the Mohicans, p. 9.

feminine weakness--fear. More often she calmly keeps her wits about her and handles the situation almost as capably as Hawkeye himself. When Chingachgook kills a colt to prevent the Hurons from discovering the hiding place of Hawkeye and his friends, both girls shudder and seem not to understand this apparent cruelty.[2] However, this would hardly be a sign of weakness since the soldier, Heyward, also is a bit nervous at this deed.

In several perilous situations Cora proves she can be relied upon to take the initiative and help the men as well as having the men help her. When the group accidentally stumbles into the path of a French sentry who challenges them, it is the presence of mind of Heyward and Cora which successfully carries through the ruse.[3] Without hesitation they answer the soldier's questions in their best French, and because of the dense mist which prevents him from seeing them clearly, the group are allowed to continue their journey. Cora seems quick to grasp the plan of Heyward and thus plays an important part in their escape. Alice too often lets emotion overcome her reason and fear overcome her self-possession to be of any real benefit to the party's welfare.

After the savages capture Dunca, Alice, and herself, Cora's initiative and alertness are revealed again when she

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[2]The Last of the Mohicans, p. 31.

[3]Ibid., p. 160.

is the only one who remembers to leave a trail for the scout and his Delaware friends.[4] Even the threats of the savages fail to frighten her sufficiently to make her halt her activity. Such actions as these are quite contrary to the picture of the heroine who faints away at the smallest sign of danger.

Cora seems to accept or even face danger, while Alice quails and becomes timid about obeying when there is a need for quick action. When the two sisters are suddenly awakened by Heyward and warned of danger, Alice screams, but Cora stands up immediately in obedience to the command to prepare to move.[5]

After their rescue from the savages by Hawkeye, Uncas and Chingachgook, Alice again succumbs to her emotions. She falls on the bosom of her sturdy sister Cora and sobs her thanksgiving.[6] Cora understands the weakness and thinly concealed emotions of the younger sister and always treats these outbursts with the greatest tenderness. The frontier life seems to have toughened her, whereas it has only made Alice more delicate and fragile.

When the Mingos attack the British party leaving the surrendered fort, Alice acts as most women or girls of her

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[4]The Last of the Mohicans, p. 111.

[5]Ibid., p. 71.

[6]Ibid., p. 132.

age might act if they were to see their friends tomahawked before their eyes. She shrieks and cries for the protection of her father. When he fails to respond, she faints. Cora, however, does not call out, but instead kneels at her sister's side "hovering in untiring tenderness over her lifeless form."[7] Despite the pleas of the songmaster, Gamut, Cora refuses to leave her sister and remains at this post until they are recaptured by Magua.

The courage shown by Cora in her constant care for her sister is recognized by nearly everyone. Heyward sees in Cora a woman of superior strength and mettle. He also knows that Alice is weaker and much more susceptible to tears. To Cora he says, "Your own fortitude and undisturbed reason will teach you all that may become your sex; but cannot we dry the tears of that trembling weeper on your bosom?"[8]

Hawkeye, like Heyward, recognizes in Cora an asset to his company and he pays fitting tribute to her brave spirit by exclaiming:

> "I would I had a thousand men, of brawny limbs and quick eyes, that feared death as little as you! I'd send them jabbering Frenchers back into their den again, afore the week was ended, howling like so many fettered hounds or hungry wolves."[9]

The evil Magua also has a discriminating glance, for

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[7]The Last of the Mohicans, p. 209.

[8]Ibid., p. 92.

[9]Ibid., p. 166.

he, too, recognizes in Alice a weak individual. He treats her as a child but Cora as a woman. He also realizes that Cora's love and concern for Alice is so great that as long as he controls the younger sister, the older will follow. Thus the savage offers to return Alice to her father if Cora will become his wife. To Cora the idea is shocking and she considers it only because she loves Alice so much. When the same proposition is put to Alice, she actually hesitates as though considering the forfeiture of her sister before she cries out, "No, no, no; better that we die as we have lived, together!"[10]

Cora's devotion to her sister and her contempt for Magua reach a peak near the end of the novel. Cora pleads before the Delaware saint, Temenund, not for her own life, but for that of Alice. As a result of Tamenund's counsel Alice is allowed to leave with Hawkeye, but Cora must go with the wicked Magua as his prisoner. Cora's pride makes it impossible for her ever to succumb to the wishes of the savage. She would rather die than be the wife of such a heathen as this redskin. She tells Tamenund that she would rather her race end "than meet with such degradation."[11]

Even when the Huron leads her away, Cora holds back in lofty reserve and in haughty tones tells the savage that

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[10]The Last of the Mohicans, p. 126.

[11]Ibid., p. 377.

violence is unnecessary. However, when the time comes for her to leave her friends and the Delawares, "the feeling and the habits of her sex maintained a fearful struggle."[12] Cora is not immune to feminine emotions, but neither is she so susceptible to them as Alice. Even as she is about to be led away into captivity, she looks after Alice's health and care.[13]

Cora's frontier courage reaches the ultimate when she refuses to continue with Magua but rather forfeits her life. She pays no attention to the redskin's warnings but pleads only to God to do His will. The demands of the Huron go unheeded and Cora is slain.[14]

Cooper in this novel approached the racially mixed marriage. Cora Munro, with her strain of Negro blood, appealed strongly to both Uncas and Magua. But Cooper placed her beyond the reach of either. And, in the end, he obliterated all traces of this forbidden love by permitting all three of them to die.

The two heroines of The Last of the Mohicans are widely contrasting characters. The only strong common bond between them is their affection for each other. Alice is a female who faints and cries and needs the protection of a

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[12]The Last of the Mohicans, p. 381.

[13]Ibid., p. 377.

[14]Ibid., p. 407.

man. But Cora is a character to be judged on the basis of Cooper's standard of the frontier. With her mixed strain of blood she gains character as she loses in gentility. Although Cooper does not indicate that Cora's racial mixture gives her greater moral strength and courage, he does, through the eyes and words of Uncas and Magua, show that her greater physical strength, her darker complexion, and her regard for others before herself make her a worthy prize to be won.

Thus Cora tends to be weighted more in favor of the frontier environment and less in favor of the commonly accepted standards of feminine behavior.

CHAPTER V

THE PRAIRIE

In The Prairie (1827), more than any other member of the Leather-Stocking Tales, one finds the helpless, clinging, fearful heroine who arouses the humor of Cooper's critics. Cooper's use of a blonde and a brunette do not help this novel, for there is little contrast between them except for physical characteristics.

Inez, the daughter of a rich Spanish planter and therefore a well cultured girl, is very small and fragile looking, but beautiful, with long, shiny, black hair. Ellen also is small and beautiful with flaxen hair and blue eyes. In figure, dress, and mien, she seems to belong to a station in society several steps above the daughters of Ishmael Bush.[1] Both girls blush easily, tire easily, and frighten easily. The mere mention of Indians makes Ellen pale, while the face of Inez becomes bloodless and her small body shrinks almost to extinction. They sigh and shudder their way through the novel and then return to the East and the kind of society which they know about and prefer. The influence of the frontier has little effect on these girls. They are merely in this wild country because of unfortunate circumstances. But as soon as possible they take their husbands back to

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[1] The Prairie, p. 6.

civilization and make them successful men.

Ellen is rather rowdy and delicately un-Victorian as she leaves the camp at midnight to hold a rendezvous with her lover, the bee hunter,[2] or as she breaks her pledge to defend the goods of Ishmael and his sons and runs off with Paul.[3] But these variations in her behavior are less frontier influence and more a response to the love which the poor parentless girl so strongly desires and needs.

Cooper did touch again the question of the interracial marriage. Mahtoree, the Sioux chief, desires both Inez and Ellen as his wives. The Pawnee chief, Hard-Heart, also looks upon the girls quite favorably. But Cooper wanted none of this element of forbidden love to succeed and thus he allowed Mahtoree to be killed and opened Hard-Heart's eyes wider so that he could see the uselessness of any love for these white women.

If any female figure of The Prairie is to be praised for her strong picture of frontier influence, it is the figure of Ishmael Bush's wife, Esther, who is "nearly the most memorable figure among Cooper's women."[4] The picture that Cooper drew of her somber life as the wife of a squatter and the mother of seven strong sons is an "epic

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[2]The Prairie, p. 23.

[3]Ibid., p. 204.

[4]Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York: American Book Company, 1948), p. 134.

concentration"[5] and completely overshadows the two "sketches" of Inez and Ellen.

Esther clings to her husband and children with an animal-like instinct. Although she is often rough and crude in her treatment of them, it is not because of the lack of love but rather because of the presence of the strong influence of the wild frontier.

> Whatever less valuable fruits had been produced in this uneducated woman by her migratory habits, the great principle of female nature was too deeply rooted ever to be entirely eradicated. Of a powerful, not to say fierce temperament, her passions were violent, and difficult to be smothered. But, however she might and did abuse the accidental prerogatives of her situation, love for her offspring, while it often slumbered, could never be said to become extinct.[6]

Esther's passion and fierce love for her young come into play when Asa fails to return from a morning hunt. The worried mother, dressed in masculine garb, shoulders her rifle and, with a war-cry to stimulate her sons, sets out to find her eldest boy. She is a determined woman who will not return until he is found or his fate known. Ishmael recognizes her burning desire and therefore keeps to the background and gives Esther a free hand.

But when Asa is found dead, the mother instinct returns and overcomes the powerful drive of the frontierswoman. She lets her husband assume his role again as the leader of the

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[5]Canby, p. 129.

[6]The Prairie, p. 139.

family. It is only when Esther is stirred about something that the "Amazon" in her pushes to the front and seizes command of her faculties.

Esther's lonely, sordid life as the wife of a renegade squatter reaches a peak of heavy tragedy when her husband, in keeping with his rude frontier justice, condemns her brother to self-execution for the murder of Asa.[7] "It is a heavy cross for a poor, misguided, and sinful woman to bear! . . . A heavy and burdensome weight is this to be laid upon the shoulders of a sister and a mother!"[8]

The Prairie is a novel dominated by the men of the story. The action and adventures leave little room for participation by women. Thus Ellen and Inez are two of the weakest heroines in The Leather-Stocking Tales. The female character is only saved by the vigorous strokes with which Cooper painted the proud and strong woman of the frontier, the memorable Esther.

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[7]Cowie, p. 134.

[8]The Prairie, p. 425.

CHAPTER VI

THE PATHFINDER

In The Pathfinder (1840) the conventional female had almost disappeared, and Cooper used only one heroine instead of two. The blonde and brunette combination which formed Cooper's pattern for his women was discarded and replaced by the "pleasant commonplaceness of the soldier's daughter, Mabel Dunham, who, being under no compulsion to be elegant, has leisure to be sweet and sensible."[1]

Mabel is a maiden of the middle class; young and beautiful, her character of intellect and refinement adds to her charm. Pathfinder says of her:

> "I have seen many of her sex, and some that were great and beautiful; but never before did I meet with one in whom I thought Providence had so well balanced the different gifts."[2]

She has been well educated by friends of her family in a civilized town away from the frontier. Although her education raises her much above her father intellectually and strains their relationship, Mabel is not contemptuous of him. Rather she desires that by some turn of fate the bond between them may be drawn tighter. Her education has also lent her an air of modest gentility which makes her more of a lady than

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[1]Loshe, pp. 87-88.

[2]The Pathfinder, p. 133.

she is actually entitled to be. It also makes her search for a husband more difficult. Pathfinder and Jasper Western, the only two men she really considers, feel that they are not good enough for her. Quartermaster Muir, who is closer to Mabel's position in society, is an object of contempt and ridicule that she never considers. His self-confidence is so close to conceit and his showy manners so farcical that Mabel disregards him completely although her father considers him a legitimate suitor. Thus it seems that too much education in a middle-class woman of the frontier poses some difficult problems. Mabel is on neutral ground, midway between civilization and nature--seemingly too good for the frontiersmen and not good enough for the officers.

Mabel does have some of the qualities of Cooper's earlier females but in a more moderate quality. She is modest and has a tendency to blush in the presence of men, especially Jasper Western. Although realizing that she cares a great deal for Eau-douce, Mabel, waits until some word of encouragement has been offered from the other side. She feels "there are ideas and feelings that her sex prefer to have expressed, before they yield them all their sympathies."[3] Mabel believes that "the man should seek the woman, and not the woman the man."[4]

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[3]The Pathfinder, p. 264.

[4]Ibid., p. 332.

Mabel also shows fright but she never becomes so "weak" that she screams or faints like some of Cooper's former heroines. She is no coward. She knows the risks of the frontier life and of being a soldier's daughter, and accepts them with strength and courage. When Jasper prepares to "shoot the falls" with her in the canoe, Mabel does become frightened, but she never considers an alternative as faithless and cowardly as her Uncle Cap's, who almost decides to take his chances by leaping out of the small craft and swimming over the rough rocks.[5]

Scalping is, of course, a horrible custom to her, and Mabel pales considerably each time a scalp is taken and the victory whoop sounded. But even the sight of the soldier's wife, Jenny, having her skull split with a tomahawk does not cause her to faint away as it would have Alice of The Last of the Mohicans, or Louisa of The Pioneers.[6]

When the storm on the lake drives almost everyone else inside the Scud, Mabel remains on deck and bears it well, much to the surprise of the men who are accustomed to women who are dependent and need consolation and care in such a circumstance.[7] Since the men of The Pathfinder are aware of

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[5]The Pathfinder, p. 35.

[6]Ibid., p. 364.

[7]Ibid., p. 258.

"a woman's gifts" for weakness,[8] the behavior of a female who adapts so well to so many situations of the frontier comes as a pleasant surprise. Cooper was again judging his heroine on the basis of frontier influence.

Mabel shows considerable heroism as she defends the blockhouse against the wiles of Arrowhead and his savage friends. She does not panic but instead takes the initiative in the defense of the small fort. Her well-timed silence leaves the Indians in doubt about the number of defenders and thus saves her from being attacked immediately. Her concern for her father once overcomes her prudence and she sets out to find him, but she quickly realizes her mistake and returns to the safety of the wooden structure. Because of her conduct and actions in so many dangerous situations, and because of the responsibility she accepts for saving the company of soldiers under her father's command, Mabel seems to be a heroine of Cooper's in whom there are some characteristics of both sexes. She often has the courage of a man while retaining the charm of a woman.

Another circumstance which reveals Mabel's character and defies the conventional rules of romance is the renunciation of Mabel by Pathfinder.[9] Sergeant Dunham on his death bed made Mabel promise to marry Natty and then gave them his

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[8] The Pathfinder, p. 39

[9] Quinn, pp. 61-62.

blessings. Natty's love for Mabel is great, but Mabel has only sincere respect and the love of a friend for the Pathfinder. Her heart really belongs to Jasper. When Bumppo awakens to this fact, he immediately withdraws his claim on Mabel and gives his best wishes to the young couple. According to the Richardsonian form for romance of this type, the two young lovers should have given up their hopes because of the promise Mabel has made to the Pathfinder and her father, and which she has every intention of keeping if Natty so desires. But Cooper released his characters from convention so that they could find happiness instead.

Dew-of-June, the girl-wife of the treacherous Arrowhead, although a primitive type, is eternally feminine and painted with skill. She might even be properly elevated to the role of the second heroine in keeping with Cooper's pattern were it not for her Indian blood which makes her immune to the customs and traditions of the white man's civilization. She has "the gifts of a redskin" and cannot completely enter the civilized world. Dew-of-June possesses the two traits of virtually every woman--love and jealousy. There is some magnetic power which draws June to Mabel and causes her to risk her life for her even though Mabel is now a rival for the affections of Arrowhead. But while June does risk her life for Mabel, she will do nothing for the others. The ways of the Indian are too much ingrained in her now. The scalps of the soldiers are the lawful spoil of the redskins and she will

do nothing to halt the apparent massacre. Her only concern is to keep Mabel in the fort where she will be safe.[10] With the exception of this one misunderstanding, the two girls adjust to each other perfectly and refrain from saying anything that might injure the other.

Dew-of-June's sorrow over Arrowhead's death, her refusal to leave his grave, and her gradual decline of health until her own death may be according to Indian custom or legend, but it touches somewhat on the concept of romance in which the girl cannot live without her lover. It is somewhat reminiscent of the situations in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet in which the lovers cannot live without each other and therefore die for each other.[11]

Cooper, again in The Pathfinder, approaches the subject of the racially mixed marriage. Arrowhead is determined to save Mabel from the slaughter and claim her as his wife. And again Cooper shows the futility of this idea by allowing the possessor of such thoughts to be slain. This erases all chance of such a thing occurring.

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[10] The Pathfinder, p. 389.

[11] See W. B. Gates, "Cooper's Indebtedness to Shakespeare", PMLA, LXVII (September, 1952), pp. 716-731, for a picture of Cooper's application of Shakespeare plots.

CHAPTER VII

THE DEERSLAYER

By the time that Cooper began the last book of The Leather-Stocking Tales, the criticism of his women may have reached his attention. Natty Bumppo's words to Harry March in the third chapter of The Deerslayer (1841) might well have been Cooper himself responding to all the criticism of his females: "You over-judge young women who as often bethink them of their failings as they do of their perfections."[1]

In this last book of the series of adventures of Natty Bumppo, Cooper returned to his pattern of using two heroines, one light and the other dark. But now the brunette is not only vivacious, but rather proud and haughty, and the blonde is not languid, but softer and more susceptible. In The Deerslayer it seems that Cooper tried more than ever before to make his women living personalities and at the same time to show the influence of the frontier on them.

Hetty, unlike the other blondes in The Leather-Stocking Tales, is not the completely weak, fainting, conventional heroine. Instead Cooper tried something new in characterization by making Hetty simple, plain but attractive, and feebleminded. Hetty's physical beauty is not quite as great as Judith's, but of a much more humble and subdued nature. She is pale and

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[1]The Deerslayer, p. 50.

seldom blushes. In short, her inner qualities seem to shine through and give her an angel-like appearance, making her attractive to others by her simple lack of guile. Hetty is not like Cooper's other females who pale at the sight of an Indian. Oddly enough, Hetty is quite friendly with the savages and often visits them. Her weak mind makes her immune to their weapons, for they respect and refuse to harm anyone inhabited by the spirits.

Hetty is not an idiot. Her mind is just enfeebled enough "to lose most of those traits that are connected with the more artful qualities, and to retain its ingenuousness and love of truth."[2] She is able to discriminate between right and wrong intuitively. It seems as if God has granted her this ability to compensate for her lack of rational power.

Hetty is

> . . . one of those mysterious links between the material and immaterial world, which, while they appear to be deprived of so much that is esteemed and necessary for this state of being, draw so near to, and offer so beautiful an illustration of the truth, purity, and simplicity of another.[3]

When Hutter and Hurry Harry prepare to go to the Indian village and collect all the Mingo scalps they can, it is Hetty who pleads with them not to go. She realizes the sinfulness of killing and scalping and shows the men a scripture verse

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[2]The Deerslayer, p. 54.

[3]Ibid., p. 559.

from the Bible to substantiate her argument. After the Mingos have captured Deerslayer and as they prepare to torture him, Hetty is on hand preaching to them from the Bible about the evil of harming anyone for such reasons as they have.

Hetty's innocence, and simple literal faith in the truths of Christianity and her certainty that they must prevail, make her one of the purest beings that earth ever held.[4]

Judith is almost a direct contrast to Hetty. She is dark and very comely, full of wit and very cunning. Physical beauty to her is very important. She is well aware of her own fine features and looks for similar blessings in those around her. Fine clothes to add to her beauty is another love of Judith. Thus one might wonder what she is doing on Lake Glimmerglass in the middle of hostile Indian territory with a gnarled old trapper and a half-wit sister, instead of dancing with cultured ladies and refined gentlemen in one of the capital cities of the world.

In Judith Hutter, Cooper achieves an exceptionally subtle study of heredity and environment. Her beauty, her worldliness, her exotic refinement, set off against the rude and vulgar background of her family environment, make her an exciting and complex heroine.[5] The inner struggle between what Judith wants and what circumstances will afford, make

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[4]The Deerslayer, p. 87.

[5]Brownell, p. 464.

her a thoroughly developed individual.

Despite Judith's love for material things, she adapts well to the situations of the frontier. When ransom is needed to buy back Harry and her father from the savages, Judith is willing to sacrifice her vanity to her heart.[6] She offers to give up her fine clothing as payment. This is somewhat against her nature, but she is rapidly changing under the eye of Deerslayer.

Judith is better able to take care of herself in this wild land than any of Cooper's previous heroines. She seldom is frightened, she never faints, and she would not think of calling for the help of any man. Early in the novel when a savage drops onto the scow, unnoticed by all but Judith, she does not hesitate in the least, but immediately rushes from the shelter of the cabin and pushes the intruder into the river.[7] When the two sisters are being pursued across the lake by three Mingos in a canoe, they are scarcely worried for "the girls, from long habit, used the paddles with great dexterity; and Judith, in particular, had often sportively gained races, in trials of speed, with the youths that occasionally visited the lake."[8]

Judith and Hetty often go out alone in a canoe to

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[6]The Deerslayer, p. 150.

[7]Ibid., p. 68.

[8]Ibid., p. 359.

scout the Indian encampment, but old Hutter does not worry about the girls a bit, for he knows they are aware of the dangers of the frontier and accept them as part of their way of life and the circumstances of the age. After Hutter's capture by the Mingoes, Deerslayer relates the perilous situation to the girls, but they show no apprehension or fear as Cooper's women usually do. Cooper himself says this is due to their being "accustomed to the hazards and accidents of a frontier life."[9]

The girls even accept disasters to others as part of frontier life. When Judith and Hetty return to the castle and find there the old scalpless Hutter, his body punctured with knife gashes and his head a mass of quivering, living flesh, although they are horrified, there are no screams nor fainting spells. Instead the girls immediately begin binding his wounds and making him comfortable.[10] They seem to be conscious that he has brought this evil on himself by his own attempt to scalp the Indians.

Even after this terrible scene Judith's fear of the Mingo warriors is not increased. She proves this by walking into the redskin camp in her fine clothes to try to gain time and to save Deerslayer's life. This daring impersonation by Judith is almost successful until Hetty in her innocency

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[9]The Deerslayer, p. 124.

[10]Ibid., pp. 364-65.

reveals that this beautifully dressed female is no other than her sister.[11]

Although Cooper did give Judith some of the characteristics of well-bred, cultured, conventional tradition, he allowed here for the first time the influences of the frontier to completely overwhelm her personality. Judith is not half gentility and half frontier woman. The proportion may have been near this at the beginning of the novel, but by the end Judith is dominated by the frontier. Environment has won over all traces of her former civilized life, and her actions and feelings are controlled by what she has learned in the years spent on Lake Glimmerglass.

Cooper even allowed Judith freedom enough to break one of the rules of feminine behavior, that of never revealing one's emotions and feelings to any man until he has first revealed his. Cooper permitted Judith to be so overcome with Deerslayer's modesty and gentle feelings that she forgets his homely physical features and only sees the kindness of the inner man. Because Deerslayer is so different from the handsome but insincere British officers from the fort, Judith is allowed to take the initiative in the "courtship" even to the point of proposing marriage to him.

> Judith was a girl of quick sensibilities and of impetuous feelings; and, being under few of the restraints

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[11] The Deerslayer, pp. 530-31.

> that curtail the manifestations of maiden emotions among those who are educated in the habits of civilized life, she sometimes betrayed the latter with a feeling that was so purely natural as to place it as far above the wiles of coquetry as it was superior to its heartlessness.[12]

Judith is ready to become the wife of the frontiersman and spend the rest of her life in the wild forests with him as a completely converted daughter of the frontier. But when Deerslayer rejects her, she calmly hears his decision and then accepting her inevitable fate, she starts off stoically into the woods on her way to the fort, civilization, and conventionality.

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[12]The Deerslayer, p. 271.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY

It is in the delineation of the female character that Cooper is supposed to have failed. Most of the criticism of his women has been that they all follow the pattern of the weak, clinging, conventional heroine; they are typed characters and remain that way. That Cooper cast his women from the same mold is not true. Cooper did form a pattern with his "females" in The Leather-Stocking Tales, but this pattern or type is not limited to weak heroines. Instead Cooper formed a kind of woman that was without precedent; she was unique because never before had there been any country which offered the combination of elements to influence her that the early United States did. Never before had a country begun its history with such things as the Indians, the wild forests, and the flat prairie. This savagery of the West combined with the Old World ways of the Eastern settlements offered Cooper an opportunity to do something new. Through the use of Natty Bumppo, a frontiersman constantly pushed westward by the growth of the colonies, Cooper showed the interplay between the standards of civilization and the influence of the frontier. By emphasizing the new American way of life, Cooper pointed out quite openly that everything and everyone did not need to conform forever with tradition and convention.

Cooper's problem, one made even more difficult because

there was no previous model to help, was to show the importance of the relationship between frontier and non-frontier. He believed firmly that America was a destined land--a land of progress.[1] The frontier for Cooper was to be pushed westward until "the boundaries of the republic have been carried to the Pacific."[2] Civilization and the frontier, for him, were inextricably bound together.

> The march of civilization with us, has a strong analogy to that of all coming events, which are known "to cast their shadows before." The gradations of society, from that state which is called refined to that which approaches as near barbarity as connection with an intelligent people will readily allow, are to be traced from the bosom of the States where wealth, luxury, and the arts are beginning to seat themselves, to those distant and ever-receding borders which mark the skirts and announce the approach of the nation, as moving mists precede the signs of the day.[3]

Cooper also seemed to feel that a change in character among the inhabitants would inevitably follow on the heels of their movement to the frontier. They would adjust to their frontier environment until their previous life would be lost in their new ways. Cooper, however, did not completely abandon the standards of civilized society, but rather modified and adapted them to the trend of his time. He was well aware of the ideal woman of early nineteenth century

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[1]See the Preface to The Prairie for a succinct summary of Cooper's view of American progress.

[2]The Prairie, p. v.

[3]Ibid., p. 70.

literature and her characteristics: delicate, full of sensibility, fair of complexion, not too strong physically, and, up to a point, well educated.[4] This pure line of woman, however, was somewhat changed by American life. The pure, graceful, blonde girl became more and more the ideal to be won as a wife, while the beautiful, strong and capable, resolute and self-willed brunette with her aggressive sexuality became the romantic lady.[5] But as well as understanding the conventional female, Cooper realized that the same frontier conditions which affected the men could also affect the women.

> It was one of the peculiarities of the exposure to which those who dwelt on the frontiers of America were liable, to bring out the moral qualities of the women to a degree that they must themselves under other circumstances have believed that they were incapable of manifesting; and Mabel well knew that the borderers loved to dwell in their legends on the presence of mind, fortitude and spirit that their wives and daughters had displayed under circumstances the most trying.[6]

Thus it appears that Cooper conceived his heroines in a broad category or pattern which ranges from almost complete conformation to convention on one extreme to almost complete conversion to the frontier at the other extreme. The character of his "females" depends upon their proximity to one of these

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[4]Ralph P. Boas, "The Romantic Lady," Romanticism in America, George Boas, editor (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 63.

[5]Ibid., pp. 63, 66.

[6]The Pathfinder, p. 336.

extremes.

Ellen and Inez of The Prairie are as close as Cooper approached to the purely conventional woman. These girls have not been away from civilization long enough to be influenced by the frontier. The one excursion which they make into the prairie in the company of Ishmael Bush and his family scarcely enables them to grow hardened to the wild life of the West. And as soon as the opportunity arrives for them to return to the East and civilization, they do not hesitate but go gladly. These girls are weakly drawn and show few traces of hardiness which the frontier normally instilled in Cooper's better characters.

Alice of The Last of the Mohicans and Louisa of The Pioneers are drawn more strongly but still retain many of the "weak female" qualities. These two girls, of all of Cooper's heroines, are the most prone to weep and faint. The move from civilization to the frontier seems to be exceptionally difficult for these "females." They fail to adjust to the new environment sufficiently and therefore meet new situations, not with courage, but with tears and screams before fainting.

With Hetty from the Deerslayer and Elizabeth from The Pioneers, Cooper reached something of a midpoint in the influence of the frontier on the feminine character. These two girls are drawn quite differently, yet they appear to be alike in some ways. Elizabeth is a cultured, intelligent

young lady who has been transferred from civilization to the frontier town of Templeton. She adjusts to the situation readily and soon her own inner qualities, tempered by the ways of her new life, create an interesting and somewhat complex individual. Hetty, on the other hand, has only a few vague memories of her mother and any previous experiences in civilized society. Most of her life has been spent on Lake Glimmerglass with her "father," the rough old Hutter. She has learned to make her own way in the forest even though she is feeble-minded. Although some of the Indian atrocities frighten her just as the panther frightened Elizabeth, still Hetty does not cry out. She has learned well her frontier lesson and bears each burden with a stout heart.

Although these two girls do represent a point about equidistant from the two extremes, Elizabeth appears to be a bit more favorable to civilization while Hetty seems to be influenced more by the frontier. The qualities of the conventional woman shine through Elizabeth more readily than through Hetty, whose experience with cultured people has been very limited.

With the creation of Mabel in The Pathfinder and Esther in The Prairie, Cooper began to show the dominance of the frontier on his heroines. These two women, each in her own way, have begun to depend less on masculine help and more on their own resources. Esther, as the wife of a squatter, has never been a member of cultured society although she has

been with more civilized people than she finds on the wild prairie. The years spent wandering around with Ishmael have hardened her to the point where she fears noone. She has become an "Amazon." In a time of crisis she does not need a man, for she is capable of handling any situation herself.

Mabel has been in contact with good society and has been given a good education. Still she adapts herself to the frontier quickly. She seems to have some natural courage which asserts itself in the time of danger. The sight of a massacre by the Indians appals her but does not cause her to faint or cry. As new problems arise, she takes them in her stride. She somehow seems to realize that these things are a part of this new way of life and if she is going to live in this wild country, she must accept them. In the end she makes her choice in favor of the frontier environment with all of its influences by marrying Jasper Western.

Cooper reached the peak of achievement in showing the influence of the frontier on the feminine character when he created Cora in The Last of the Mohicans and Judith of The Deerslayer. Here are two creatures dominated by the circumstances and environment of the frontier. Cora, although she has just left a civilized settlement, adjusts with amazing rapidity to every new situation. She shows no fear for her own life, but is more concerned for her sister, Alice. Judith, of course, has spent more of her life in contact with the new country and therefore has not had to adjust so quickly.

Frontier influence on her has been longer and more natural. Any small memories she has of previous time spent in civilized society are vanishing before the trees and streams of the forest.

Cora does not have to make a choice between civilization and the frontier. But her ability to adapt to this new life is evidenced by the admiration of the Indians. Both Magua and Uncas recognize in Cora a woman who could serve their needs well. She is not weak and frail and helpless. Instead, it appears that she could learn the ways of the squaw quickly and easily. This ability to adapt to the hard life of the wilderness makes Cora as valuable for a mate as any Indian maiden. Several times Cora seems to look with favor upon Uncas as though she might completely turn to a wilderness life with him. Her death, however, keeps this possibility a secret.

Judith makes her decision definitely for a frontier life. Civilization has disappointed and hurt her. The soldiers from the nearby fort have only toyed with her heart and thus have embittered her. She is ready and willing to marry Natty and live forever by his side constantly moving westward ahead of onrushing civilization. She is sure that she has all of the hardy qualities which a frontier wife needs, and Bumppo agrees with her. But he does not want anyone tainted as she is by her affair with one of the soldiers. Therefore, in the end, Judith must return to civilization to begin her

life all over again. She must attempt to discard all the influences of the frontier and become a member of conventional society.

Cooper seems to have some rules of female behavior which he followed rather closely. He seemed to feel that no woman should make the mistake of confessing her love for a man before she knew that the man loved her. Ellen Wade, Elizabeth Temple, and Mabel Dunham all had to keep their emotions silently until the actions of their lovers gave them leave to show their own feelings. Cooper did depart from this practice a bit in the case of Judith Hutter. He allowed her to take the initiative in courting Natty Bumppo even to the point of proposing marriage to him. Perhaps the growing emancipation of women in the eighteen-thirties and eighteen-forties made Cooper feel that this departure from the customary practice of giving the male the initiative was allowable.

Another idea that disturbed Cooper was that of racially mixed marriages. While he often made his women so admirable that they attracted the affections of the savages, he never allowed any crossing of the race lines. Several times in The Leather-Stocking Tales Cooper approached this situation but he did not let it culminate. Cooper may have used this idea merely for its suspense element since he never actually spoke out against interracial marriages. Many of the thrilling episodes of The Last of the Mohicans, The

Prairie, and The Pathfinder hinge on the love of a savage warrior for one of the heroines. Without this conflict, the value of The Leather-Stocking Tales as novels of adventure would be greatly lessened.

By viewing Cooper's heroines of The Leather-Stocking Tales as a broad, new type of woman, it appears that while his worst women are imitations of the conventional romantic heroine, his best have a quality of independence, of initiative, which the very circumstances of American life developed, especially on the frontier. He did not emphasize the weaknesses and fears of all of his women. Rather he liked to ponder on their strength and courage. In the ordinary situations in Cooper's Leather-Stocking Tales, his females are things to patronize and flatter, but in times of stress they show heroic powers of strength and endurance.[7]

Cooper used his frontier as a basis for evaluating his "females" and for making them an integral part of his Tales. The frontier adds to them, makes them come alive and reveals things about them which are quite different from the usual and accepted things. Whenever he had a chance to draw a woman who, from her position in life, or the peculiar circumstances into which she is thrown, is moved by deep passion or feeling or roused by dangers to put forth more strength than is known

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[7]Percy H. Boynton, A History of American Literature (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1919), p. 147.

to females found in the sheltered life of civilization, we can see the hand of the same strong, steady Cooper who created the immortal Natty Bumppo.

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An Abstract of

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN COOPER'S LEATHER-STOCKING TALES

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

BOWLING GREEN, OHIO

February, 1960

SMITH, BURLEY G., M.A., February, 1960. English.

An Analysis of the Female Characters in Cooper's Leather-Stocking Tales. (55 pp.) No.

Faculty Adviser: Lowell P. Leland

It was the purpose of this study to explore the characteristics of the American female in James Fenimore Cooper's frontier novels, The Pioneers (1823), The Last of the Mohicans (1826), The Prairie (1827), The Pathfinder (1840), and The Deerslayer (1841). Three critical areas were explored concerning the novels: (1) the attitudes of the critics towards Cooper's women; (2) the legitimacy of such attitudes; (3) the character of the women themselves.

The study analyzed the women in the novels by comparing the characteristics actually developed in them by Cooper and the characteristics assigned to them by previous critics. The investigation revealed that the majority of the criticism of Cooper's "females" suggested that they seemed to be weakly drawn, conventional women who depended for their protection upon the men of the novels. The investigation further revealed that most of this criticism was in terms of general statements without actually considering the women individually.

The study concluded that Cooper's women did not all follow the pattern of the weak, literary conventional female. Cooper gave several of his women traits of strength and courage. These women were able to stand alone against the new dangers of the American civilization. The closer the contact between Cooper's women and the frontier, the stronger they appeared to be in character. The resultant conclusion was that Cooper combined the forces of nature and the forces of civilization in some of his women to form a new type of character who was capable of adapting to any situation.