

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

2012

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Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Filozofická fakulta

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Studijní obor: Anglistika a Amerikanistika – Francouzská filologie

Idealizované zobrazení Indiánů v díle Jamese Fenimora Coopera *Poslední Mohykán* a René François Chateaubrianda *Načezové*

The Idealized Portrayal of Indians in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and René François de Chateaubriand's *Les Natchez*

Praha, 2012

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V Praze dne.....

podpis.....

Chtěla bych poděkovat vedoucímu své bakalářské práce prof. PhDr. Martinu Procházkovi, CSc. za trpělivost a ochotu a za cenné připomínky a rady, které mi pomohly k vypracování mé bakalářské práce.

Abstract in English

The aim of this bachelor thesis is the depiction of the portrayal of Indians in two pieces of art, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and René François de Chateaubriand's *Les Natchez*. Both authors depict the character of the Indian on the background of the emerging American states.

The exotic setting, which fascinated a great number of artists, served as a device for the critique of the European society and civilization. The wilderness of the American continent was shrouded in mystery and thus stimulated the imagination of writers. Cooper and Chateaubriand were influenced by the reading of early reports of adventurers and ethnographers. These records were mingled with their own experience, traditions, myths, and the common presuppositions. Therefore, in both pieces of art, Indian characters bear idealized character features.

Cooper and Chateaubriand both deal with the issue of mixing of races, gender and racial roles, and tension between civilization and savagery. Due to the problem of the blood-purity which would be destroyed by the interracial marriage, the main heroes of *The Last of the Mohicans* are sentenced to die. Chateaubriand, on the other hand, burdens his characters with Christian features and their lives are spent in brooding over the uneasiness of life and destiny.

The thesis also deals with the question of Indian alliances with white settlers. Indian characters are depicted as supporters of both warring parties in the context of the American War of Independence. At the same time, they are depicted as members of a civilization which is connected with nature and the natural way of life. Therefore, the Native Americans are incapable of assimilation or integration into the white society. Cooper is

concerned with the problem of acculturation and assimilation of the Indians into the civilized society. Chateaubriand, on the other hand, uses his Indian characters as a device for the critique of the French society after the Great Revolution. Nevertheless, both authors draw that these two cultures are incapable of a peaceful coexistence. The misunderstanding and mutual conflicts lead to fights and presupposed inferiority of the Native Americans and the period of Indian fights and removals is considered as a delicate period of the American history.

Key words: James Fenimore Cooper, René François de Chateaubriand, Indians, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Les Natchez*, civilization, savagery

Abstract in Czech

Hlavním tématem této práce je problematika zobrazení Indiánů ve vybraných dílech anglické a francouzské literatury. Jedněmi z nejvýznamnějších autorů zobrazujících indiánské kmeny v prostředí rodících se amerických států jsou James Fenimore Cooper a René François de Chateaubriand. Z jejich rozsáhlé tvorby jsou pak pro detailní analýzu vybrána díla *Poslední Mohykán* a *Načezové*.

Mnoho autorů si pro své příběhy vybíralo exotické prostředí, které kontrastovalo se soudobou civilizací. Americký kontinent pak svou nedotčeností poskytoval podněty pro vytváření příběhů. Cooper i Chateaubriand vycházejí jak z četby raných cestopisů, tak i z vlastních zkušeností, imaginace a mýtů, a tak velké množství Indiánů nese pouze idealizované charakterové rysy.

Cooper i Chateaubriand se zabývají problematikou míšenectví, rasových problémů a střetů mezi civilizací a divořstvím. Hlavní hrdinové *Posledního Mohykána* pak nejsou z důvodu „nečisté rasy“ schopni v nově vznikající společnosti existovat a umírají. V případě *Načezů* Chateaubriand připisuje svým hrdinům křesťanské prvky a ti pak bloudí v přemýšlení nad svým vlastním osudem.

V práci se také soustřeďuji na otázku politizace indiánských kmenů. Indiáni jsou vyliční jako stoupenci obou válčících stran v kontextu boje o nezávislost. Zároveň jsou představiteli národa, který je pevně spjat s přírodou a není schopný se podrobit konvencím civilizované společnosti. Historické události tvoří pozadí obou příběhů a oba autoři používají indiánské kmeny ke kritice společnosti; Cooper se zabývá začleněním Indiánů do společnosti amerických osadníků, Chateaubriand používá Indiány ke kritice francouzské společnosti po období Velké francouzské revoluce.

Klíčová slova: James Fenimore Cooper, René François de Chateaubriand, Indiáni,
Poslední Mohykán, Načezové, civilizace, divoštví

Table of Contents:

1. Introduction	p. 10
2. The Frontier and the Expansion West	p. 14
3. <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> and the World of Indians	p. 17
3.1 The Captivity Narrative	p. 19
3.2 Cooper's Indians	p. 21
3.3 Magua vs. Uncas	p. 26
3.4 Characterization of Indian Characters	p. 31
3.4.1 Cooper's Women Characters	p. 32
4. Mixing of Races	p. 34
5. The Glorification of Indians in Europe	p. 38
6. The Natchez Indians	p. 40
7. <i>Les Natchez</i>	p. 43
7.1 The Origins of the Novel	p. 45
7.2 Chateaubriand's Heroes	p. 48
7.3 The Social Criticism	p. 53
8. Conclusion	p. 56
9. Bibliography	p. 62

1. Introduction

The American continent is by its vastness and diversity of land and people very often compared to a huge melting pot. People of different nationalities have learnt to live together but the mutual coexistence evolved from a long period of struggles and fights for specifications of each nation's liberties and freedom.

Since my childhood I have been interested in the character of an Indian warrior. The Indian symbolized the image of a member of a different society with different traditions and customs who lived in harmony with nature and was not bound with rules and regulations. Being amazed by the unbounded life of men in uncivilized conditions and the mystique of the Frontier I chose as a theme of my bachelor thesis the theme of the portrayal of an Indian in English and French literature. From the scale of works depicting the Indian society two works have been chosen for further analysis; James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* as a representative of English literature and the French René François de Chateaubriand's *Les Natchez*.

The first settlers had started by the exploration of the land a conscious colonization of the wilderness of the New World which symbolized a land of New Canaan or New Eden. Moreover, the settlers had found in the New World nations which completely differed from the European society. Richard Slotkin stated in his preface to Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* that the coming settlers had found men in "uncivil or precivilized conditions" who had been unfortunately not able to adjust to European conditions and manners.¹

¹ Richard Slotkin in James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) xi

The attitudes toward Native Americans changed rapidly. Some wanted to preserve the unique history, traditions, and culture of the Indians, some wanted to possess the fertile lands of Native Americans. After a long period of struggles, many Indian tribes were driven from their homelands to reservations or completely sentenced to extermination. In general, the history of Indian removals is still considered to be a delicate issue.

Both James Fenimore Cooper and René François de Chateaubriand were either adored for their literary output, or condemned. They both depicted the Indian way of life, traditions, culture, and nature. What is interesting is the fact that both authors were influenced by works of earlier explorers, adventurers or ethnographers but they used the sources freely and very often misused or misinterpreted the actual facts. The first part of the thesis deals with the portrayal of an Indian in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. Cooper situated most of his works in the region of the Frontier which had not been fully explored by that time. As a source material Cooper used works of early explorers, mainly by Joseph Heckewelder. Cooper depicted the confrontation between the Native American savagery and white settlers' civilization, which attracted attention of the reading public. The thesis explores the origins of *The Last of the Mohicans* which was published in 1826, the same year as the publication of Chateaubriand's revised *Les Natchez*, and why the American myth was so important for the creation of the American identity.

The thesis tries to explain the merit of *The Last of the Mohicans* which was also influenced by the genre of the captivity narrative. The central story of the capture of two young women and the attempt to break them free from the brutal and uncivil savages brought fascination and suspense. Cooper opposed the noble Indian represented by Uncas and the brutal Indian symbolized by a devilish Magua. The thesis deals with the way the two authors depicted the Indian characters and how they followed or destroyed the

common presuppositions of Indians. Cooper is very often accused of having created an exaggerated romanticised portrayal of an Indian. Chateaubriand, on the other hand, implies Christian themes. In his works, members of the Indian society are burdened with the idea of the original sin.

Chateaubriand is a representative of European authors who were fascinated by the natural life in the wilderness of the American continent. In 1826 he published an immense epic in prose *Les Natchez* which is unfortunately nowadays almost forgotten but which undoubtedly deserves further study. *Les Natchez*, similarly as *The Last of the Mohicans*, described the conflict between civilization and savagery. Being influenced by the sojourn in America, Chateaubriand compiled his own memories of the voyage and works of earlier explorers but similarly as Cooper, he very often misinterpreted the actual history. Nevertheless, Chateaubriand was able to create an exclusive image of the American wilderness. *Les Natchez* depicted the massacre of the Natchez Indians in Louisiana in 1729. Chateaubriand in his work focused on his personal portrayal of Native Americans based on his personal experience and on the internal characterisation of Indian characters which served as a self-reflection of Chateaubriand himself but which also served as a device to criticize the changing post-revolutionary French society.

Chapter 2 deals with the definition of the original concept of the Frontier, its natural resources, the vision of coming settlers and the fascination of writers. Chapter 3 provides further analysis of Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, its origin, and influence of Walter Scott's historical novel and of the genre of the captivity narrative. Further attention is paid to Cooper's portrayal of Indians and the bad vs. good Indian opposition. The portrayal of Indians by European writers and the fascination of European authors with the wilderness of the New World is detailed in chapter 5 and Chateaubriand's portrayal of the Natchez

Indians in his massive epic *Les Natchez* is studied in chapters 6 and 7; paying attention to origins of the novel, portrayal of characters, and the contained social criticism.

2. The Frontier and the Expansion West

From the first arrivals of adventures and settlers, the American continent symbolized a land of vast opportunities which was shrouded in a veil of mystery. Explorers and adventurers were fascinated by the natural beauties and natural resources they had found in the New World. The New World was often called New Canaan or the Garden of Eden, for the great number of resources it provided for the new settlers. Most explorers were impressed by the wilderness of the American West and the Frontier. The Frontier was a strip of land covered with thick forests and marshes. Moreover, it was a region which had not been adequately explored and represented the untouched place which needed to be civilized. However, the Frontier did not represent just the untouched land. First, it stood for the actual political and battle border between the two warring parties, The British and the French. Second, the most popular definition of the American Frontier was pronounced in July 1893 by Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner was a professor at the University of Wisconsin and a member of the American Historical Association where he delivered a paper “The Significance of the Frontier on American History” in which he stated that the Frontier was “the meeting point between civilization and savagery.”² By the 1920s Turner’s thesis had become the most widely accepted interpretation of American history.³

The confrontation between savagery and civilization stood as a source of inspiration for writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Adventures and explores gave rise to a popular myth of a brutal savage, who was torturing, scalping, and murdering white settlers in the Frontier. These myths were partly based on truth, partly embellished for the attraction of the audience. The mystique of the land and its inhabitants symbolized

² Richard W. Etulain ed., *Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional?* (New York, Boston: Bedford/St.Martin’s, 1999) 3

³ Etulain 6

for writers a new, not yet sufficiently explored, theme which could bring them fame and appraisal of the reading public. It can be said, that most of the early texts concentrated on the portrayal of nature not from the point of view of a writer but from the point of view of an explorer or an observer as the very first aim of the works was to give evidence of the land and its resources and to attract interest in other settlers to continue further settlement.

The Frontier experience was for Turner the principal cause of the American exceptionalism. It can be declared that the notion of challenge, exploration, and movement to untouched places is engraved in the American nation. For Turner, the most important effect of the Frontier was the promotion of democracy and individualism. In fact, the exploration was a kind of challenge and those who decided to settle in the “virgin land” had to be individualistic. Settlers coming to the New World needed to rely entirely on themselves and had to face potential danger. Some of the critics and historians define the period of new settlement as “the Westward Movement.”⁴ Crèvecoeur, one of the most influential writers of the eighteenth century, called the early settlers “the western pilgrims.”⁵ The diligence, courage, and the determination to overcome all the struggles associated were later a fundamental element in the creation of the new civilization. In other words, these factors were the essential pillars of the new American society.

The American land could be for writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries compared to tabula rasa. However, according to Richard White, the portrayal of North America as largely unknown and empty was a cartographic convention, but did not correspond to reality. Earlier maps of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had portrayed

⁴ Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American literature and the American West* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965) 6

⁵ Fussell 7

a densely occupied continent.⁶ *The Oxford History of the American West* provides another account. It states that in the eighteenth century, more than one hundred thousand Native Americans occupied the region of the Frontier. The number included more than two dozen groups, varying in population from a few hundred to twenty thousand.⁷ Nevertheless, for writers, the Frontier was still compared to the virgin land where they could unleash their imagination and creativity as there was no written lore, or at least very little in evidence.

The myth of the American West captured attention of James Fenimore Cooper. Cooper was one of the American authors of the nineteenth century, who wrote almost thirty-two novels.⁸ His predominant theme was the portrayal of the American Frontier. Moreover, Cooper brought to the consciousness of the reading public the image of the Indian as a hero and an enemy. Cooper highlighted the tension between the civilization and savagery and confronted the noble and the brutal savage. He created a series of novels, which influenced the contemporary society and which nowadays are more or less considered as the reading for youth. Still, Cooper himself considered the series to be a serious literary step and remarked that “[i]f any thing from the pen of the writer [...] is at all to outlive himself, it is, unquestionably, the series of “The Leatherstocking Tales.”⁹

⁶ Etulain 51

⁷ Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O’Connor, Martha A. Sandweiss (eds.), *The Oxford History of the American West* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 116

⁸ Robert A. Rees, Earl N. Harbert eds., *Fifteen American Authors Before 1900* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1971) 3

⁹ Rees 3

3. *The Last of the Mohicans* and the World of Indians

The Leatherstocking Tales is a series of five novels, which are interconnected by the main hero character, Natty Bumppo. The series contains *The Prairie*, *The Deerslayer*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Pioneers*, and *The Last of the Mohicans* and were published from 1823 to 1841. The last mentioned novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, gives a detailed portrayal of American Indians' life and of the fight for survival.

The origin of the name Indian is interesting and deserves further mentioning. The first person who had used the name "Indian" was Christopher Columbus. After the arrival to the New World, Columbus called the inhabitants *los Indos* because he mistakenly thought that he had arrived in the East Indies. Within a half-century "Indian" had been adopted to English and it referred to all Native Americans. The theories on the origin of the Indian tribes in America vary, but the most probable is that mentioned by Robert Hine and John Mack Faragher that the Indians were descendants of ancient hunters who had migrated from Asia to America across the Bering land some thirty to forty thousand years ago. These tribes then had spread over the continent and inhabited the land.¹⁰

Cooper became widely appraised during the nineteenth century and was widely regarded as a "national novelist". The term was used not only by George Washington, but also by Washington Irving and Herman Melville.¹¹ All of them praised Cooper for dealing with the American continent and with events, which gave rise to the emerging of the American civilization and society. It can be stated, that the American authors, especially during the colonial times, could much freely use their imagination and innovative themes

¹⁰ Robert V. Hine, John Mack Faragher (eds.), *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) 3

¹¹ John McWilliams, *The Last of the Mohicans: Civil Savagery and Savage Civility* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995) 18

than their European counterparts. However, most of the American writers used long established patterns and genres. Cooper was fascinated by the genre of historical novel. The genre of historical novel is associated with Sir Walter Scott and Cooper is very often labelled as “the American Scott”, or for the French as “le Walter Scott des sauvages,”¹² even though he concentrates rather on historical romance. Therefore it can be concluded that the historical romance is a derivation of historical novel and romance. It works with themes of love, mystery, symbolism, and the plot features an important historical incident. Helen Hughes suggests that the historical romance plot contains narrative motifs which are the impetus of the action and a number of details and incidents which make the reader conscious of the historical context.¹³ On one hand, the historical romance represents a critique of society and on the other hand, it represents a portrayal of past times, embellished for the reading public.

The Last of the Mohicans was first published in 1826 and it is Cooper’s most famous and probably the most popular novel of The Leatherstocking Tales series. *The Last of the Mohicans* was Cooper’s first great adventure story from the period of the Seven-Year War. Cooper drew heavily on records of earlier writers, mostly of earlier adventurers and settlers. His essential source material was an account of a Moravian missionary John Gottlieb Ernestus Heckewelder. Heckewelder was a missionary among the Delawares and his records of the Indian tribal life were published in the early twenties of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Cooper as a romantic writer strengthened his creative power and even though he used the original record of Heckewelder, most of the information used is

¹² Ray Allen Billington, *Land of Savagery: Land of Promise* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985) 31

¹³ Helen Hughes, *Historical Romance 1890-1990* (London: Routledge, 1993) 27
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10095794&ppg=11> (13.11.2011)

¹⁴ Rees and Harbert 47

transformed for the purpose of the historical romance. Furthermore, in Cooper's writing the genre of historical romance was transformed into an adventure romance.

In *Pages and Pictures from the Writing of James Fenimore Cooper* (1861) his daughter, Susan Cooper, revealed the probable origin of *The Last of the Mohicans*. According to Susan Cooper, the novel was a result of a voyage to the Lake George Region where Cooper, together with some other British gentlemen, was amazed by the beauty of the American scenery. He was mesmerized by the Glenn Falls and made commitment to use "the very scene for a romance" to compose a piece of work which would glorify the natural scenery of the Frontier and the tension between civilization and non-civilization in the region. The first draft of *The Last of the Mohicans* was completed only four month after the voyage.¹⁵

3.1 The Captivity Narrative

The Last of the Mohicans is not just an adventurous historical romance, but some critics even consider it to be a captivity narrative. Richard Slotkin declares that the captivity narrative was also an "archetype of the American experience" as it "provided a way of addressing the fear and guilt that accompanied the emerging American pattern of profound mobility."¹⁶ The captivity narrative was very often written by women, who were recalling the devastation of white settlements by indigenous peoples. The Indians were devastating the settlements, scalping and killing members of the colonies, and burning the crops. Those who survived the first attack of the Indians were taken hostage. According to

¹⁵ William P. Kelly, *Plotting America's Past: Fenimore Cooper and The Leatherstocking Tales* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983) 45-6

¹⁶ Hine Faragher 65, 67

Michal Peprník, the statistical data of British Canada show that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries over 750 people were taken hostage by Indians. The time spent with the Indians varied from six months to more than 20 years. From the 750 people, 90 were killed, 100 became missing, and 60 assimilated and lived with the Indians.¹⁷

One of the first, and probably the most famous captivity narrative was written by Mary Rowlandson. Rowlandson, who was a wife of the leading Puritan preacher in the Lancaster colony in Massachusetts, published in 1677 *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs Mary Rowlandson* where she depicted her own captivity two years ago. The Indian captivity was a real threat. Rowlandson admitted that in the first time, she wanted to die, but finally, she was driven by, what Kathryn Stodol and Jamee A. Levernier call, the survival syndrome.¹⁸

“I had often before this said that if the Indians should come, I should choose rather to be killed by them than taken alive, but when it came to the trial my mind changed; their glittering weapons so daunted my spirit, that I chose rather to go along with those (as I may say) ravenous beasts, than that moment to end my days...”¹⁹

Many captivity narratives were written by women because it attracted attention of the audience. The story of a captured woman was for the reader much more attractive than a captivity narrative written by a man. Rowlandson depicted the Indians as inhuman creatures or bloody pagans. Increase Mather warned all the Puritans that the Indian was an

¹⁷ Michal Peprník, *Topos lesa v Americké literatuře* (Brno: Host, 2005) 56

¹⁸ Peprník 60

¹⁹ Mary Rowlandson, *Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/851/851-h/851-h.htm> (7.11.2011)

image of what could happen to a Puritan who succumbed to the enchantment of the wilderness.²⁰ Ray Allen Billington also comments on the portrayal of Indians in captivity narratives. He says that “the red men of captivity narratives were...slovenly, slothful, degenerate, and mercilessly cruel, degraded by their contact with whites and instinctively animalistic in their savagery”.²¹ Consequently, the captivity narrative has become a symbol for arousing fear and hatred for Indians. The main purpose in Cooper was to strengthen the story of suspense. McWilliams states that the major change in Cooper is in totally different motivation for the very act of capture.

3.2 Cooper’s Indians

The Last of the Mohicans is a novel whose main theme is the tension between civilization and non-civilization; the confrontation of white settlers with indigenous people. From the European perspective, Columbus made a great discovery but from a Native American perspective, he began an invasion.²² The coming settlers did not want to assimilate; the Native Americans, sometimes called “the children of nature”, did not understand the action of settlers and thus, they could not assimilate. Even though Cooper provided the reader with a detailed description of Indian tribal life, customs, tradition, and fight, his experience was based only on occasional observing visits to Washington and Iroquois fringe communities in central New York.²³ His portrayal of Delaware and Iroquois tribes was based on previous reports and entries of missionaries and adventurers.

²⁰ Peprník.55

²¹ Billington 25

²² Milner et al. 81

²³ McWilliams 62-3

One of the great issues of the period after the publication of *The Last of the Mohicans* was the problem of authenticity of the novel. Cooper transformed the Indian character for purpose of a romantic work of art and thus, changed the image of a savage into an image of a romantic hero. The Indian was a perfect subject for a national literature for he was associated with the past, and his way of life and actions were influenced by circumstances of the westward expansion. Cooper was criticized for being unduly sympathetic and for creating an idealized portrayal of Indians, which was definitely not authentic.²⁴ One of Cooper's critics of romanticised Indians was a distinguished Westerner Lewis Cass who was the governor of Michigan Territory. Cass criticised not only Cooper but also his source material Heckewelder claiming that "his Uncas [...] ha[d] no living prototype in our forests."²⁵

The actual situation of Indian tribes in the early United States was troubling. John McWilliams declares in his book *The Last of the Mohicans: Civil Savagery and Savage Civility* that in 1790, more than two million Indians were living west of the frontier line beyond the Allegheny Mountains. This number was more than half of the number of white population and the Indian was regarded as a threat and blocking force to further western settlement.²⁶ The common presupposition was that the Indians were illiterate and brutal creatures living according to the laws of nature. Because of this fact, Indians were considered inferior and were placed on a lower level of social hierarchy. The Indians were downgraded not only on a social level but also in a political sphere. They had in reality no rights and even though their culture and traditions needed preservation, they were excluded from the society as a menace and were sentenced to extinction. Some of the missionaries

²⁴ McWilliams 17

²⁵ Rees and Harbert 48

²⁶ McWilliams 52-3

tried to convert the Indians to Christianity, giving the soul a chance of redemption. Nevertheless, most of the society did not believe that Indians were capable of admitting white rules and were convinced that they will not adapt to white culture. People were hypersensitive and started conscious discrimination of Indians.

During the Revolutionary War, one of the popular military toasts was: “Civilization or death to all American savages.”²⁷ The more brutal statement is of U.S. Cavalry General Philip Sheridan who said: “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.”²⁸ Indian culture symbolized “savagery”, white culture in contrast represented “civilization” and they were not able to coexist peacefully.²⁹ Nevertheless, some individuals did not hold the view that all Indians were brutal and bloody creatures and deliberately chose the life in wilderness. One of the defenders of the Indian sovereignty was J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur who chose to live among Indian tribes. In his *Letters from an American Farmer* Crèvecoeur expressed his own standpoint on the Noble Savage. He mentioned that “the nearer men returned to Nature, the more abundant their lives and the greater their happiness” and that “without temples, without priests, without kings and without laws, they are in many instances superior to us.” Despite the unflagging will to surpass the Native American culture, in Crèvecoeur’s view Europeans could never equal.³⁰

Other supporter of the Indian culture was the famous philanthropist Thomas Jefferson. Throughout his life, Jefferson aimed at the improvement in the conditions of human life to achieve the “pursuit of happiness”. Nevertheless, Jefferson’s attitude towards the Native Americans was slightly different. He wanted to transform Indian hunters into

²⁷ Quoted in Roy Harvey Pearce. *Savagism and Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 51

²⁸ Quoted in Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Penguin, 1970) 170,172

²⁹ McWilliams 52-3

³⁰ Billington 19

agricultural farmers because the cultivation of land symbolized for Jefferson the cultivation of nation.³¹ Moreover, Jefferson did not idealize the Noble Savages but saw them as the essential power force of the new continent. According to Frank Shuffleton, Jefferson “valued the Indians as masters of a native semiosis whose culture was in the process of change”.³² One of the possible solutions which could appease the already escalated confrontation of white settlers with the Indians was the European demand for furs. By the system of Indian alliances and trade networks, the French wanted to block British expansion in the North America. In general, French colonization was dominated by the fur trade whereas the English colonization was dominated by the demand for land. Nevertheless, very soon even the Indians became dependent on the European market items such as metal tools or woollen blankets.³³

Cooper was viewed as a sympathiser of the Indians. Moreover, Cooper was a concerned critic of social values and system. Cooper once said: “I am a true historian...a describer of society as it exists, and of men as they are.”³⁴ We can assume that it was the current situation of Native Americans, being driven from their homelands that encouraged Cooper to reveal the conditions of Indians to the general public and made him raise questions of the actual injustice on the Indians.

During the eighteenth century, white settlers nearly overtook the Native American population and Indians became highly dependent on European material and goods. Moreover, Indian allies joined the British and French troops during the imperial wars.

³¹ Robert C. Baron, *Thomas Jefferson: In His Own Words* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2009) 19

³² Frank Shuffleton, *Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993) 267
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10142120&ppg=276> (28.11.2011)

³³ Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare 1675-1815* (London: Routledge, 1998) 9
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10054943> (24.11.2011)

³⁴ In Donald Darnell, *James Fenimore Cooper: Novelist of Manners* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993) 6

Nevertheless, Indians very often joined the armies for their own motives and both French and British complained of their misconduct and disloyalty.³⁵ Even though the Royal Proclamation of 1763 should stabilize the relations and trade with the Native Americans, it was universally disregarded. The Indian Intercourse Act of 1790 gave Indians a status of an independent nation with its own culture and land but it did not change the current situation and Indians faced open hostility of white settlers. After the war of 1812 and a number of long disputes and conflicts, it was the lust for Indian lands which during the presidency of James Monroe and Andrew Jackson resulted in the Indian Removal Act in 1830, a plan of an organized relocation of over 45 000 of Indians west of the Mississippi.³⁶ According to Armstrong Starkey it was the lack of unity which undermined the resistance of Indian tribes to the colonial expansion.³⁷

The plan of integration of Indians into the white society was based on the submission of Indians to European customs. Cooper was ambivalent about the Indian situation and the westward expansion.³⁸ Similarly to Hawkeye, Cooper is on the border between the white and native society. According to Aiping Zang, Cooper was concerned about the integration of Indians by means of acculturation rather than assimilation resulting in a cultural modification. Cooper's hero Natty Bumppo is a product of a cultural clash. He chooses to live among the Indians and adopts the Indian way of life to the extent that he can no longer return to the white society. He says that: "Whoever comes into the woods to deal with the natives, must use Indian fashions, if he would wish to prosper in his

³⁵ Starkey 101

³⁶ Justin Quinn ed., *Lectures on American Literature* (Praha: Karolinum, 2011) 66

³⁷ Starkey 10

³⁸ Aiping Zang, "Can the Twain Meet through Acculturation? The Cultural Hybrids in Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales" California State University of Chico
<http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/suny/1997suny-zhang.html> (26.2.2012)

undertakings.”³⁹ Nevertheless, Cooper mentions that these two dominant cultures cannot ever coexist peacefully and that the Indians should be given territory where they could “advance in civilization to maturity”.⁴⁰

3.3 Magua vs. Uncas

Despite the fact that Indians were considered primitive with delight in torturing and scalping white men, Cooper was fascinated by the origins of their culture, religion, and traditions. It can be stated that Cooper never portrays his Indian characters as innocent or pure. He provides the reader with fascinating record of cruelty and divides his Indian characters into villains and heroes. In other words, Cooper consciously parts his Indians into evil and good. The division of powers was for novelists a useful device. The noble hero is integral to the plot of the novel. He serves as a companion to Hawkeye, Cooper’s “man without a cross”. On the other side stands the bad Indian who symbolizes the Satan and counterpart of the good Indian and tests the power of the main hero character. In addition, the bad Indian is very often depicted as brutal and demonic, living according to the laws of survival. According to Ray Billington, the good Indians were modelled on the friendly Arawaks found by Columbus on Hispaniola, and the bad Indians on the cannibalistic Caribs from the Caribbean islands.⁴¹ Edwin Fussell provides the critics with another theory of the good vs. bad opposition. He mentions that “the good Indians are marvel of self-control, whereas bad Indians, like Magua, resemble the white men by whom

³⁹ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) 66

⁴⁰ Allan M. Axelrad, “Historical Contexts of The Last of the Mohicans: The French and Indian War, and Mid-1820s America” Fullerton, CaliforniaState University
<http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/suny/2009suny-axelrad.html> (18.2.2012)

⁴¹ Billington 5

they have been corrupted.”⁴² In other words, evil Indians are the product of white civilization and the process of cultivation. One of the prejudices of Indian men was that they were alcohol-addicted. However, alcohol or liquor was manufactured in British and French distilleries and thus, it was a white settler who had introduced “fire water” to Native Americans.

The myth of the noble savage has its roots in the works of European travellers and ethnographers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The original author of the “noble savage” definition is the French writer and philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau used the term “savage” as a device for the critique of contemporary society. Noble savages were those indigenous people who lived according to the rules of nature. Moreover, writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries used the word “noble” because the savages shared virtues that the white men did not possess. In writings, the savages were kind, generous, hospitable, and glorified.⁴³ Nevertheless, Rousseau’s conception of savagery was remote from this definition. For Rousseau, the savage “could not be either good or bad, and had neither Vices nor Virtues.”⁴⁴ For Rousseau the savages were noble because they were not tempted by wealth and their acts were adjusted to the needs of nature.

The noble savage, Uncas, is the true last of the Mohicans. Uncas is a son of Chingachgook and he is the last living descendant of an old Indian tribe of Mohicans. Cooper based his portrait of Mohicans on a true Indian tribe, the Mohegan Indians. The Mohegan Indians inhabited the coastal area of present-day Connecticut. The Mohegan

⁴² Fussell 40-1

⁴³ Billington 22

⁴⁴ In Terry Ellingson, *Myth of the Noble Savage* (New Jersey: University of California Press, 2001) 81-2 <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10051548&ppg=23> (18.1.2011)

Indians were one of the Algonquin tribes and after the arrival of Puritans they were lead by the chief Uncas. The tribe then joined white troops in the Pequot war. Cooper's Uncas is also a young warrior who is faithful to the Indian tradition and to the Indian natural life. Together with his father, Uncas joins Hawkeye and he is tasked with the protection of young ladies, Alice and Cora Munro. From the first scene, Uncas fascinates the young ladies:

“At a little distance stood Uncas, his whole person thrown powerfully into view. The travellers anxiously regarded the upright, flexible figure of the young Mohican, graceful and unrestrained in the attitudes and movements of the nature.”⁴⁵

Despite his Indian origin Uncas possesses some character traits which are not usual for an Indian warrior. He is also attracted by the beauty and wilderness of Cora Munro and falls in love with her. Unfortunately, Uncas is a descendant of a pure blood tribe. On the other hand, Cora Munro's origin is symbolically darkened by her mixed blood origin. The possible relationship between Uncas and Cora would mean the elimination of one race and thus, the mixing of races is inconceivable and the two characters are sentenced to die at the end of the novel.

There is another noble hero in the novel, the old chief Chingachgook. Chingachgook symbolizes an experienced mentor, who has lived long enough to experience all the beauties of nature and life, and also pains of wars and fights. His physical forces are nearly gone but his power is in his wisdom and in the ability to understand the symbols of nature. Even when he is facing the imminent danger, the old

⁴⁵ Cooper 52

chief remains calm and relies on wisdom. His relationship with Hawkeye symbolizes a universal fellowship. Their relationship is interracial, asexual and very often wordless.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, we should not confuse the noble hero with ultimately pure and innocent character. Even noble savages as Uncas and Chingachgook are warriors and they are not afraid of cruel killing and scalping of enemies. In general, a scalp symbolized a warrior's strength, speed, and supremacy over his rival. Indian believed that the piece of scalp and hair carefully sliced from an enemy's head contained the victim's spirit (Manitou).⁴⁷ The scalps were exhibited on a visible place, very often tucked in the belt. The more scalps a warrior had, the more he was credited. In chapter XIV, Cooper depicts the nature of an Indian warrior. The group is moving towards William Henry but the place is besieged by French troops. Duncan Heyward manages to get the group pass by. Nevertheless, it is "the gift and nature of an Indian" which results in a cruel death of a young French warrior"

"[Duncan] was interrupted by a long and heavy groan, which arose from a little basin...[...] Another groan, more faint than the former, was succeeded by a heavy and sullen plunge into the water [...] while they yet hesitated in uncertainty, the form of the Indian was seen gliding out of the thicket. As the chief rejoined them, with one hand he attached the reeking scalp of the unfortunate young Frenchman to his girdle, and with the other he replaced the knife and tomahawk that had drunk his blood."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ McWilliams 13

⁴⁷ James Kirby Martin, *America and its people* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1989) 28

⁴⁸ Cooper 137-8

On the other side of the battlefield stands a devilish Magua, a symbol of a “bad” Indian, or a cruel savage. His physical strength is imposing but his past is influenced by the appearance of white settlers. In other words, Magua is longing for revenge on white men as his misfortunes were caused by the expansion of white settlers:

“Magua was born a chief and warrior among the red Hurons of the lakes; he saw the suns of twenty summers make the snow of twenty winters run off in the streams, before he saw a pale-face; and he was happy! Then his Canada fathers came into the woods and taught him to drink the fire-water, and he became a rascal.”⁴⁹

As he had succumbed to alcohol, he was expelled and was rejected by his tribe and race. For this reason, Magua is sentenced to no other behaviour than that of a brutal villain. Cooper clearly distinguishes Magua from Uncas. His appearance is devilish, he has no sense of pity and his acts are in accordance with the traditional attitude of Indians. From the first scene, Magua causes sense of fear, brutality and close death. The fact that Magua was chosen to safely guide Munro’s daughters across the battlefields, who were in fact his enemies’ daughters, could be deciphered as one of Cooper’s interventions into action. Cooper was very often blamed for romanticizing his characters. Here, as if the noble Christian would like to give Magua a second chance for a new start, and as if the character wanted to prove, that as an Indian in British allies, Magua no longer sensed the desire for revenge. Nevertheless, Magua is a proficient traitor and leads Munro’s daughters into an imminent danger.

⁴⁹ Cooper 102

3.4 Characterization of Indian Characters

Regardless of Cooper's poor knowledge of a true Indian culture and traditions, he was able to create a credible image of Indian manners and habits. Cooper put together fragments of information from older records and was able even to imitate Indian language. Nevertheless, his portrayal should not be misinterpreted as an actual record of an Indian way of life. Cooper was aware of the fact that almost all the records of Indian tribes of the eighteenth century were made by Christian missionaries who were not good observers of manners.⁵⁰ Moreover, it can be stated that Cooper was a writer of social transformation.

However, he was not as good at depicting the mental processes of his characters. Cooper leaves a great deal of space on portrayals of beauties of natural scenery but does not deal too much with the psychological aspect of the characters. In fact, we are never really allowed to clearly explore and understand the psychological processes within the minds of his characters because any character does open his or her mind to the reader and all the thinking and brooding over the uneasiness is behind the curtain of moral code and stiffness. The outline of a psychological insight gets the reader from noble statements of Leatherstocking but still, we do not really know what Hawkeye is actually thinking of the situation and what is his true position within the society. All we know is the fact that Hawkeye is a "man without a cross".⁵¹ It is evident that Cooper's Indian characters do not rely very much on the psychological contemplation. They much more depend on the symbols and signs of nature. Indian way of life is, in other words, fundamentally based on nature and its resources. It is adapted to the natural course of events and natural harmony and thus, Indians are reconciled offspring of the Mother Earth.

⁵⁰ McWilliams 62-3

⁵¹ Cooper 126

3.4.1 Cooper's Women Characters

The novelists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries faced a problem of depiction of their women characters. In most of the novels, heroines were not central to the plot and they served as an adornment of the society. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gender roles remained widely separate. Women had in fact no legal rights; they could not vote or be publicly employed. Women were expected to become wives and mothers and their primary role was to raise children. One of the presuppositions why writers started to portray their women characters in the centre of action can be the fact that women were politically and socially downgraded and thus, writers, as a creative persona, projected into the women characters their own ideas and desires.

Most of the writers resorted to the common archetypes of the Dark and Fair heroine. In Cooper's novels, his women characters tend to be dull and uninteresting. Mitchell Summerlin distinguishes three types of Cooper's women characters: the refined socialite; the coquette, and the innocent naïve young girl. These three groups overlap in some features but each exhibits traits that distinguish it from the other.⁵² *The Last of the Mohicans* sticks to the tradition of dark and fair heroine and presents an opposition between sisters, Cora and Alice Munro. The sisters' heroine opposition was also common in the early Gothic novels and has evolved to the present day. Alice represents the fair lady, symbolically blond-haired with blue eyes, who embodies the pure innocence. In fact, her behaviour meets the conventional requirements of society. Alice never acts on her own; she is dependent on the guardians. Throughout the novel, Alice is weak and faints in every moment of possible confrontation with Indians. On the other side stands the dark lady

⁵² Mitchell Summerlin, *A Dictionary to the novels of James Fenimore Cooper* (Greenwood: The Penkville Publishing Company, 1987) 10

Cora. She is dark-haired, dark-eyed and she possesses some virtues of men.⁵³ She is kind, strong, courageous, mature, and ready to sacrifice her own life for the rescue of her sister Alice.

“Though the cheeks of Cora were pale, and her countenance anxious, she had lost none of her firmness; but the eyes of Alice were inflamed, and betrayed how long and bitterly she had wept.”⁵⁴

Cora has a possible origin in the historical figure of Jane McCrae, a daughter of a Scottish Presbyterian minister from Jersey city who had left Fort Edward under the protection of Indian guide but whose body was unfortunately found scalped in the forest.⁵⁵ Cora Munro’s destiny is very similar to Jane McCrae’s. Nevertheless, some major differences in each heroine’s destiny can be found. Unlike Cora Munro, Jane McCrae wanted to join her brother after her father’s death and she was to be married to a provincial officer of the army. The cruel death of Jane McCrae fascinated not only writers but also painters and her story gave rise to a number of visual interpretations one of which Cooper must have seen in New York City in 1825.⁵⁶ According to Paul Revere, Jane McCrae became “the American Joan of Arc” and her story instigated a source of hatred for the British Indian allies.⁵⁷

⁵³ Nina Baym, “The Women of Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales” *American Quarterly* Vol.23, No.5 (Dec., 1971) 702 www.jstor.org/stable/2712252 (24.6.2011)

⁵⁴ Cooper 172

⁵⁵ McWilliams 70

⁵⁶ McWilliams 129

⁵⁷ John Koster, “Jane McCrea, remembered as a victim American Indian brutality, may have died under different circumstances” *Military History* (Jun 2000) 12-16 <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/docview/212664207/fulltext/1334ED6BEC0AB6E51F/1?accountid=35514> (28.11.2011)

4. Mixing of Races

The Frontier represented an ethnic melting pot. Several different cultures had come to live together, but some of them were not able to assimilate or adjust their customs to others. Some Indian spiritual leaders even considered the whites and Indians as the product of two different creations; whites being recognized as not fully human.⁵⁸ The confrontations and disputes caused armed conflicts and wars. Most of the Indian alliances with white settlers were based on commerce. Nevertheless, the contact with white traders had brought Indians more struggles than profit. The French relationship with Native Americans was based on the demand for furs. The mutual needs for survival taught the French to live in apparent harmony. Moreover, during the first decades of the eighteenth century, French-Indian marriages were nothing unusual. Intermarriages symbolized an adoption of a different clan culture and traditions and in various cases calmed the potential conflict. People of mixed blood were called “Métis” and became one of the many ancestors of the American civilization.

The English colonies, on the other hand, preferred the land ownership. The Frontier region abounded in fertile land, rivers full of fish, and animals which were praised for their furs. The possible way to seize control over territory was either an armed conflict or, as Native Americans had very little legal rights, removal from the land. The removal policy of Andrew Jackson caused that Native Americans left their hereditary land and were forced to move beyond the Mississippi river. American settlers perceived the Indian removal as the preservation of Indian culture, religion, and traditions which would be threatened by the

⁵⁸ Starkey 14

non-Indian impact. Nevertheless, many Europeans criticised the removal policy as the factual deprivation of the land.⁵⁹

Native Americans replied in armed conflicts which took place within the context of the Frontier; a terrain where Indians were masters and non-Indians in disadvantage. It can be said that the armed resistance lasted from the first attack in Virginia in 1607 to the war of 1812 which means that the armed resistance lasted for more than 200 hundred years. The war of 1812 was a turning point in attitudes towards the Native Americans. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, Americans struggled to define the status and rights of the Indian.⁶⁰ Henry Clay, Speaker of the House, sensed the change in the attitude: “We are powerful and they are weak...[T]o use a figure drawn from their own sublime eloquence, the poor children of the forest have been driven by the great wave which has flowed in from the Atlantic ocean to almost the base of the Rocky Mountains, and, overwhelming them in its terrible progress, has left no other remains of hundred tribes, now extinct, than those which indicate the remote existence of their former companion, the mammoth of the New World.”⁶¹ A great number of Native American tribes was by the greediness of white settlers sentenced to extinction.

The Last of the Mohicans can be understood as Cooper’s response to the problem of elimination of the race. The relationship between Uncas and Cora Munro symbolizes the possible relationship between civilization and savagery. The two characters are mutually attracted by the spirit of the other. Cora is impressed by the physical strength of Uncas, but she is also attracted by the mystique of Uncas’ behaviour. Uncas feels for Cora a silent

⁵⁹ Billington 129

⁶⁰ Susan Sheckel, *Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) 7, 4
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10035837&ppg=9> (24.11.2011)

⁶¹ Sheckel 4

admiration. Throughout the novel, Cooper highlights the description of action rather than long and complicated dialogues. Reader is then impressed by Uncas's actions and heroism. He is the calm looker-on and speaks only in the case of defence of his honour or tribe or the honour of his fellowmen. Uncas also shows noble character traits when he mourns the deaths of innocent women:

“When Uncas, who moved in front, had reached the centre of the plain, he raised a cry that drew his companions, in a body, to the spot. The young warrior had halted over a group of females, who lay in a cluster, a confused mass of dead.”⁶²

Through the relationship of Uncas and Cora Cooper depicts the contemporary view of interracial liaisons. The possible relationship between Uncas and Cora could appease the tension between the warring parties. Nevertheless, Richard Slotkin speaks about the “natural repugnance” which influenced the American society.⁶³ Only the descendants of the pure blood race could be the proper members of the American civilization. In other words, only the white-white or Indian-Indian marriages were considered proper. The conditions of interaction were predicated on skin colour and the superiority of white men.⁶⁴ Therefore, the marriage between Uncas and Cora was out of question.

Uncas is the last descendant of the old Indian tribe. Cora Munro is, on the other hand, darkened by her mixed blood origin. Cooper reveals that Cora is partly “negro” and that her ancestry is dubious. Cora cannot marry Uncas because they are not of the same race. Moreover, Uncas cannot marry Cora because his race would be crossed and it would

⁶² Cooper 183

⁶³ Cooper preface xvi

⁶⁴ Chester Mills, “Ethnocentric manifestations in Cooper’s *Pioneers and The Last of the Mohicans*” *Journal of Black Studies* Vol.16, No.4 (Jun., 1986) 442 www.jstor.org/stable/2784199 (21.4.2010)

mean the elimination of his race. Other presupposition is that Cora and Uncas are the true representatives of their respective cultures. Their only destiny is to die at the end of the novel because there is no other solution to the problematic relationship of the two lovers. Chester Mills declares that Cora may not marry neither Uncas nor white man because she is not pure blooded; she stands outside the society and thus, she must die. He also mentions that Cora and Uncas must remain separate even in death and thus, they are buried separately.⁶⁵ In the character of Cora, Cooper shows us the gender and racial limitations of society which are often very difficult to step over.

⁶⁵ Mills 446-7

5. The Glorification of Indians in Europe

As it was already mentioned, American continent could be for writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries compared to tabula rasa. The mystique of the land and its inhabitants fascinated not only coming settlers but also attracted writers in Europe. A great number of artists founded their narration on the actual voyage to America. The world of Indians symbolized for European writers something the writers had not met yet. It symbolized a world which fundamentally differed from the world of the European society which was bound by traditions and conventions and where the artistic themes started to be exhausted. Consequently, European writers in search for new topics and themes commenced to depict the Indian way of life. It can be said that the success of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Series* in Europe was based on need for new themes. Cooper created the romanticised portrayal of a savage from a distant land, attained the attraction of the reading public, and aroused the wave of fascination which is sometimes referred to as "Coopermania". For the French, James Fenimore Cooper was "le Walter Scott des Sauvages".⁶⁶

The French reading public could discover the distant land through a great number of travelogues and ethnographic records. It is interesting that the French audience preferred American authors rather than French authors as there was no piece of art which could be compared to The Leatherstocking Series phenomenon. Nevertheless, in 1826, the same year of publication as *The Last of the Mohicans*, there appeared an immensely interesting work of art written by a French author which is unfortunately nowadays almost rejected by the readers. René François vicomte de Chateaubriand published in 1826 a massive epic in

⁶⁶ Billington 31

prose *Les Natchez*. It depicted the massacre of the Natchez Indians in Louisiana by the French colonist groups in 1729.

6. The Natchez Indians

After the French Revolution in 1789, Chateaubriand was disappointed and disillusioned by the new society in France. In the new regime, Chateaubriand experienced only disintegration and void. Consequently in 1791, Chateaubriand spent six months in America trying to find new solutions and opportunities. Above all, the Indian way of life served Chateaubriand to accuse the French society of its degeneration. The life in accordance with nature was opposed to the life bound by stiff moral and social codes. In addition, by studying the Native American culture, Chateaubriand could express the essence of human social structure.⁶⁷ The Natchez Massacre by French colonist in 1729 symbolized a serious interference into another nation's culture and traditions. Even though two accounts of the uprising appeared in Paris in 1731, the ultimate account did not appear until 1744.

The Natchez Indians were heirs of a culture rooted in the ancient Cahokian civilization and the historic seat was along the St. Catherine Creek.⁶⁸ Relationships between the French and the Natchez were at first hostile. The Natchez Indians inhabited a very fertile land. On the contrary, the French colonists inhabited a surrounding area which was mostly covered with swamps and marshes and thus, the land of the Natchez Indians was much more suitable for cultivation. Even though the French colonists concentrated on the fur trade rather than on the agricultural utilization of land, the settlement built on the swampy subsoil could not prosper and expand as the settlement built on the fertile land.

⁶⁷ Gordon Sayre, *Indian Chief As Tragic Hero: Native Resistance and the Literatures of America, from Moctezuma to Tecumseh* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 215
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10273442> (21.12. 2011)

⁶⁸ David J. Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004) 12
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10157897&ppg=12> (4.1. 2012)

The early French visitors mentioned that the Natchez region was “even more beautiful than [they] realized.”⁶⁹

The Natchez Indians possessed one of the most highly stratified and centralized tribal systems.⁷⁰ The Natchez believed that they were descendants of the sun. The all-powerful chief was called the Great Sun and ruled over the rest of the tribe having the status of a demigod. The French colonizers attempted to establish a friendly and powerful liaison with the Natchez Indians in order to strengthen the position of the French colonies in the New World. French colonizers learned to live peacefully with the Indians for the purposes of trade and also defence. The early French settlers believed that if they lived with Indians in mutual harmony, they would be protected against the violent raids and attacks. In 1716 the French established a trading post called Fort Rosalie.⁷¹ David Libby comments in his *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi* on the composition of society in French colonies. He mentions that the contemporary description of Louisiana portrayed an exciting but dangerous land populated by terrifying beasts, bloodthirsty infields and thus the prospective settlers were much more scared than encouraged to come. Those who then settled the colonies were convicts, outcasts or people from impoverished regions.⁷²

The Natchez massacre in 1729 was preceded by two conflicts. The first conflict is known as the First Natchez War and took place in 1713 when a group of French traders was assaulted and killed by some Natchez Indians. Unfortunately, the assault threatened the French politics in the region. The French wanted to secure their military supremacy over the English by a system of forts built on several strategic locations including the

⁶⁹ Libby 21

⁷⁰ Libby 14-15

⁷¹ Libby 23

⁷² Libby 24-5

Natchez Indians region. In consequence, the assault of the French traders led to an armed revenge.⁷³ The second conflict called the Second Natchez War took place in 1722 when the Natchez Indians tried to drive the French colonizers out of their territory. Still, the bloodiest conflict happened seven years later, in 1729. The command over Fort Rosalie was taken by new commandant Chépart. In consequence of his misconduct and cupidity the Natchez Indians rose and destroyed the post and settlement killing almost two hundred whites and taking women and children as hostage. Next year the French and their Choctaw allies attacked the forts into which the Natchez had retired and liberated most of their captives.⁷⁴

Le Page du Pratz considered that the reason for so much armed rebellions and massacres was caused by “settlers having too familiar intercourse with the Indians”.⁷⁵ Gordon Sayre compares in his book *Indian Chief as a Tragic Hero* the Natchez massacre to the Jamestown massacre in 1622 when the Algonquians of the Powhatan Confederacy attacked and killed English settlers in the colony. Sayre thus places into opposition the French and English colonial history. Nevertheless, whereas the Jamestown massacre was documented in books and pamphlets and became an important historical milestone, the Natchez massacre in Louisiana was not sufficiently documented until 1744.

⁷³ James Barnett, *Natchez Indians: A History to 1735* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2007) 63

⁷⁴ John R. Swanton, *The Indian Tribes of North America* (City of Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1979) 188-190

⁷⁵ Barnett 85

7. *Les Natchez*

Chateaubriand's voyage to America can be defined as a kind of an artistic and personal escape from the changing society and the changing world. Chateaubriand wanted to discover and understand the way of life of representatives of different cultures and traditions. André Maurois depicts Chateaubriand's exile as a result of a need of fertile ground for creation of the literary output. Chateaubriand himself described the New World as "an asylum for those who love the real liberty."⁷⁶ It cannot be denied that Chateaubriand was a disciple of Jean Jacques Rousseau who is associated with the definition of the "noble savage" conception. It can be said that in his early works, Chateaubriand in many aspects follows Rousseau. Rousseau criticised the destructive influence of society on human being. The society is degenerated by its regime, morality, and institution which ruin a human being, which is in a natural state innocent and good. Rousseau defined the romantic flight from society to nature as a militant protest against the social structure.⁷⁷ In his preface to *Les Natchez*, Chateaubriand declared that he wanted to create an epic novel about the natural state of a human being.

«J'étais encore très jeune, lorsque je conçus l'idée de faire l'épopée de *l'homme de la nature*, ou de peindre les mœurs des Sauvages, en les liant à quelque événement connu. Après la découverte de l'Amérique, je ne vis pas de sujet plus intéressant, surtout pour des Français, que le massacre de la colonie des Natchez à la Louisiane. [...] Toutes les tribus indiennes conspirant, après deux siècles d'oppression, pour rendre la

⁷⁶ André Maurois, *René ou la Vie de Chateaubriand* (Paris: Bernard Grasset edition, 1938) 52 « un asile pour ceux qui aimaient la vraie liberté »

⁷⁷ Jan O. Fischer a kol. *Dějiny francouzské literatury, 19. a 20.století 1789-1870* (Praha: Academie, 1966) 95-6

liberté au Nouveau-Monde, me parurent offrir au pinceau un sujet presque aussi heureux que la conquête du Mexique. Je jetai quelques fragments de cet ouvrage sur le papier ; mais je m'aperçus bientôt que je manquais des vraies couleurs, et que si je voulais faire une image semblable il fallait, à l'exemple d'Homère, visiter les peuple que je voulais peindre."⁷⁸

Chateaubriand wanted to create an image of an ancient nation. He wanted to give the French reading public the notion of the Natchez Indians' culture, traditions, and the way of life. In contrast to Rousseau's conception of the pure and innocent "l'homme de la nature", Chateaubriand depicts his characters with the whole scale of character traits and the weaknesses, confusions, and contradictions are transferred into the natural state of being. Fischer comments that the only possible solution from this mal de siècle is the conversion to the church where the characters could purify from the original sin.⁷⁹ Therefore, it can be stated that Chateaubriand's characters cannot be defined as the clear projection of Rousseau's theories. In the preface to *Atala*, a part of the series of novels on the Natchez, Chateaubriand declares:

"Au reste, je ne suis point comme M. Rousseau, un enthousiaste des Sauvages ; et quoique j'aie peut-être autant à me plaindre de la société, que ce philosophe avait à s'en louer, je ne crois point que la pure nature

⁷⁸ René François de Chateaubriand, *Œuvres romanesques et voyages* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969) preface 16 "I was still very young when I conceived the idea of composing an epic on the man of nature, or delineating the manners of the savages by connecting them with some well-known event. Next to the discovery of America, I could not find a more interesting subject, especially for the French, than the massacre of the colony of the Natchez in Louisiana[...] All the Indian tribes conspiring, after two centuries of oppression, to restore liberty to the New World, seemed to me to furnish a subject nearly as happy as the conquest of Mexico. I threw some pieces of information on the paper but I recognized that I missed the true colours and If I want to create a credible image, I need, as Homer, visit the people I want to depict."

⁷⁹ Fischer 95-6

soit la plus belle chose du monde. Je l'ai toujours trouvée fort laide, partout où j'ai eu l'occasion de la voir. Bien loin d'être d'opinion que l'homme qui pense soit un *animal dépravé*, je crois que c'est la pensée qui fait l'homme."⁸⁰

7.1 The Origins of the Novel

Before the voyage to America, Chateaubriand had read a number of travelogues and accounts of French, English, Italian, and American voyagers and explorers. From the common borrowings it is evident that Chateaubriand was inspired by works of le père de Charlevoix, Bartram, Carver, Beltrami, Mackenzie, and most of all Le Page du Pratz and Dumont de Montigny.⁸¹ Le Page du Pratz explored the Natchez region and in the early 1720s bought land from the natives he called not "sauvages" but "naturels".⁸² Dumont de Montigny travelled around the Louisiana territory. He lived with Natchez from 1727 until January 1729. In general, Le Page du Pratz's *Histoire de la Louisiane* (1758) and Dumont's *Mémoires historiques sur la Louisiane* (1753) are one of the most important accounts of the colonial history of Louisiana. Both of them devote several chapters to the description of the Natchez uprising. According to Gordon Sayre, they agree on most

⁸⁰ Chateaubriand preface 19 "However, I am not like Mr. Rousseau, an Indian enthusiast, and though I may have much to complain about the society that this philosopher had to rent it I do not believe that the pure nature is the most beautiful thing in the world. I have always found it very ugly, wherever I had the opportunity to see it. Far from being of the opinion that the man who thinks is a depraved animal I think it is the thought which makes him the man."

⁸¹ Victor L. Tapié, *Chateaubriand : écrivains de toujours* (Paris: Seuil, 1983) 35

⁸² Sayre 210

circumstantial details but differ in how they cast blame for the revolt and the French retaliation.⁸³

Even though Chateaubriand uses the ethnographic accounts of the Natchez region, he, in a similar way as Cooper, misuse and misinterprets most of them. Even though Chateaubriand wanted to explore the land with his own eyes, in reality, he had never visited the land of the Natchez Indians.

“En 1789, je fis part à M. De Malherbes du dessein que j’avais de passer en Amérique. Mais désirant en même temps donner un but utile à mon voyage, je formai le dessein de découvrir par terre le passage tant cherché et sur lequel Cook même avait laissé de doutes. [...] Je me proposais de traverser tout le continent de l’Amérique septentrionale, de remonter ensuite le long des côtes, au nord de la Californie, et de revenir par la baie d’Hudson, en tournant sous le pôle.”⁸⁴

Some critics accuse Chateaubriand of fraud claiming that having visited Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York he hurt his arm at the Niagara Falls and embarked on boat heading to Le Havre. Thus, he did not explore Louisiana or the Natchez territory and he definitely did not come in contact with the Natchez Indians.⁸⁵

Another false use of source material is in the dating of the massacre. Even though the event happened in 1729, Chateaubriand dated the massacre in the preface to 1727; two

⁸³ Sayre 212

⁸⁴ Chateaubriand preface “In 1789 I communicated to M. de Malherbes the plan which I had formed of going to America. The same time, I conceived the design of discovering by land the passage which was so much sought, and respecting which Cook himself had left doubts. I intended to cross the continent of North America, then to go back along the coast in Northern California, and to return by Hudson Bay, turning under the pole.”

⁸⁵ Tapié 34

years before the actual conflict. Nevertheless, the environment of the colonial America so much influenced his imagination that he was able to create the world of *The Natchez* based on his memories and observations. Moreover, he projected into the work dream visions; admiring and impressing visions of the New World. Being betrayed by the new regime after the Great Revolution in 1789, Chateaubriand was able to identify himself with the revolting Natchez Indians who were trying to retain their hereditary land and culture. Chateaubriand's essential political principle was the defence of liberty and fight against tyranny and despotism.⁸⁶ On the other hand, he also found reasons to sympathize with the retaliating French colonists who represented, according to Chateaubriand, just mediators of the new French regime.⁸⁷

The immense novel *Les Natchez* can be divided into two parts. The first part is subdivided into twelve chapters and it is often described as an epic in prose. Traditional Christian mythology mingles with Indian mythology and allegories. Moreover, the first part of the novel is burdened with the Christian theme. Frequent allegories refer to the purifying and redemption of human soul by turning to religious belief. Although the novel appeared as late as 1827, two parts of the original manuscript, which were according to Chateaubriand finished before 1800, had been published separately as *Atala* and *René*. *Atala* was a narration of the Natchez chief Chactas addressed to René. The savage Chactas narrated the history of his love to Christian woman Atala who finally chose death instead of love. Chactas addressed his own narration to René, showing him that he was not the only broken-hearted and despaired man. Atala was burdened by a promise she had given to her mother on deathbed. Due to this unfortunate promise to dedicate her life to Virgin Mother and purity, Atala was tortured by her love to Chactas and did not see any solution

⁸⁶ Tapié 117

⁸⁷ Sayre 238

than to commit a suicide and find peace. The tragic love story was an immense success. René, a story of despair and disillusion caused by unfulfilled love to René's sister Amelia, was published in 1802 and because the theme of incest was popular at these times the publication was successful too. *René* depicted the disrupted human soul by tangle of emotions and passions which lead to a complete downfall. Both novels were to be inserted in Chateaubriand's later work *The Genius of Christianity*.⁸⁸ In later editions these two accounts were not published within *Les Natchez* but Chateaubriand used a system of footnotes and references to both narrations. In general, these two narrations *Atala* and *René*, complement the whole story of the Natchez Indians. *René* precedes the hero's exile into the wilderness and Chactas's story stands in an opposition to René's narration. Chateaubriand shows us another point of view on the love-suffering human soul. It can be said that Chateaubriand was an author of despair and life reversals. *The Natchez* deal with the theme of the massacre of the Indians but also with the theme of betrayal and the loss of expectations and hopes. Chateaubriand expands in *Les Natchez* René's story and at the end of the narration, René sends a letter to Celuta which can be understood as his personal testament, confessing his personal dissatisfaction, his character and the reasons of his reluctance to take an active stance towards life.

7.2 Chateaubriand's Heroes

René, the romantic exile, comes to demand hospitality on the Natchez Indians tribe; he is accepted and guarded by the old chief Chactas.

⁸⁸ Louis Martin Chauffier, *Chateaubriand* (Paris: Éditions Seghers, 1969) 42, 49

“Étranger du pays de l’Aurore, si je t’ai bien compris, il me semble que tu es venu pour habiter les forêts où le soleil se couche ?...Trouveras-tu dans nos savanes le repos que tu viens y chercher ? Es-tu certain de ne jamais nourrir dans ton cœur les regrets de la patrie ?”⁸⁹

René, similarly to Hawkeye in Cooper’s Leatherstocking Series, chooses to live among the Natives and adopts the Indian way of life. In other words it can be said that René tries to find a new home among the pure and innocent indigenous people being disillusioned by the current state of the French society. He can no longer see any solutions to his present way of life. Chateaubriand’s main character René can be compared to Cooper’s hero of The Leatherstocking Series, Natty Bumppo. Natty is an active member of the Indian society and he is not afraid to step out and assert his demands and visions. On the contrary, René is very often described by the critics as “home fatal”. But above all, René can be definitely characterised as Chateaubriand’s projection. Chateaubriand perceived the modern French society as disenchanting. By creating the epic of the indigenous people he wanted to find the way out of the misery he felt to be in. René spends days in solitude and meditations. He deals with the loneliness of soul and does not want to admit his own responsibility.

Eléonore Zimmermann observes that René is one of the first heroes to be created mainly out of the personal experience of the author.⁹⁰ It can be even stated that the expression of René’s character is one of the most sensitive projections of the author. One of the obvious allusions to Chateaubriand’s projection into René is the fact that he bears

⁸⁹ Chateaubriand, *Les Natchez* 172-173

⁹⁰ Eléonore Zimmermann, Rereading René, *The French Review* Vol.32, No.3 (Jan.1959) 247
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/384287> (13. 2. 2012)

Chateaubriand's middle name. René is a renegade wandering in a completely different world he was used to live in. His exile can be compared to Chateaubriand's exile in England after the outburst of the French Revolution. René constantly suffers but he is actually one of the most passive characters in *Les Natchez* at all. According to Zimmermann, Chateaubriand's René does not want to think of the past because it arouses brooding memories and he does not want to think about the present and the future because it is meaningless, without any centre.⁹¹ Seeing René fatally brooding over the uneasiness of life produces an allusion to Goethe's Werther; both characters being burdened by the inexplicable sense of nothingness. Chactas, the great protector of René among the Natchez, even sees René as a self-destroying element tormenting his surroundings. Nevertheless, the relationship between Chactas and René can be related to Hawkeye's relationship to Chingachgook. Still, it has to be mentioned that Chactas is not the projection of the Indian chief as we can see in Cooper, but he is a mix of an Indian and a European, being influenced by his long sojourn in Europe.⁹²

The exile from their own society and the choice of being member of the Indian tribal system are features which enable readers to compare René to Natty Bumppo. Both René and Natty Bumppo return to primitive virtues. On the other hand, it has to be mentioned that there is one important difference between these two characters and it is the blood purity. René is not a "man without a cross" like Natty Bumppo because in the second part of the book he marries an Indian woman Céluta. Even though Natty Bumppo tries to immerse in the Indian society and culture, he is not involved in the blood line, proudly declaring that he is "a man without a cross". On the contrary, René, entering a marriage with an Indian woman, becomes engaged into struggles and misfortunes of the

⁹¹ Zimmermann 252

⁹² Ellingson 204

tribe. Sainte-Beuve, one of the French critics of the period, accused Chateaubriand of having burdened René and other characters in *Les Natchez* with the “morale plaquée.”⁹³

Nevertheless, Chateaubriand opens an interesting spectacle of a complex narration of the Natchez Indians culture and traditions. A considerable part of the novel is devoted to Chactas’ narration of his voyage to Europe, especially to the French court of Louis XIV where Chactas is accepted as an honourable representative of the Natchez Indian tribe. Chateaubriand uses Chactas as a device to criticize the French society, because Chactas describes the conditions of the French society. André Maurois states that for Chateaubriand the inactivity and the misery were much more grievous than for his companions because his disgrace was more complete and his temperament ardent and he grappled with the new French regime. Moreover, Laura Murray names the fact that a great number of writers concentrated on the Indian narration as “the aesthetics of dispossession”. She explains that the romanticised ideas of dispossession and loss served to conceal historical differences and discrepancies in colonial and Native American losses.⁹⁴ Cooper did not concentrate much on the psychological insight of his characters. Chateaubriand, on the other hand, depicted the mental processes very well. The characters abide in thinking and brooding over the uneasiness and hardship of everyday life but also over the beauties and abundance of nature.

The second part of the book changes into an impressive uninterrupted narration which depicts the climatic episodes of the Natchez massacre. The massacre serves as a climax of the novel, being preceded by the marriage of René and Céluta, Chactas’ niece

⁹³ In Zimmermann 251 “false morals”

⁹⁴ Sayre 258

with “regard of night and smile of dawn”.⁹⁵ René is accused of conspiracy, is betrayed by Ondouré, a real traitor, and he is taken to prison by the French allies. At the end of the epic, René is killed by Ondouré on the eve of the massacre.

“Au lever du soleil, dit-elle, tu seras sauvé; Outougamiz viendras; tu sauras tout ce que je ne puis te dire dans ce moment ! – Eh bien ! dit René, si cela peut guérir ton mal, je m’éloigne ; tu m’expliqueras plus tard ce mystère, qui n’est sans doute que celui de ta raison troublée par une fièvre ardente .[....] René va sortir : un bruit d’armes retentir au dehors. René tourne la tête ; la hache lancée l’attenit et s’enfonce dans son front, comme la congée dans la cime du chêne. [...] René tombe dans sa cabane : René n’est plus !”⁹⁶

The remnants of the Natchez Indians then exiled and found hospitality among an allied tribe and finally the last descendants died out in the war against the Iroquois.

“Les Indiens chez lesquels le Natchez s’étaient retirés périrent presque tous dans une guerre contre les Iroquois, et les derniers enfants de la nation du Soleil se vinrent perdre dans un second exile au milieu des forêts de Niagara.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Chateaubriand *Les Natchez* 168

⁹⁶ Chateaubriand *Les Natchez* 562-3 “At the sunrise, she said, you will be saved. Outougamiz will come and you will know everything I cannot tell you at this moment. Oh well, René said, if this could soothe your fear, I will retreat, you will explain to me later the horrible mystery which is probably just a result of your mind troubled by some kind of a burning fever.....René leaves the hut: a sound of rifles can be heard outside. René turns his head, an ax is hurled, it reaches and sinks into his front, as an axe in the crown of the oak. [...] René falls into his cabin. René is gone.”

⁹⁷ Chateaubriand *Les Natchez* 575 “The Indians among whom the Natchez Indians had withdrawn almost all perished during the war against the Iroquois and the last children of the nation of the Sun were lost during the second exile in the forests of Niagara.”

7.3 The Social Criticism

Chateaubriand was a romantic author. His idealism was in description of natural sceneries and beauties and in attempting to convert the Indian characters to Christianity. Moreover, Chateaubriand considered Christianity to be of all religions the most poetic and most favourable to the arts.⁹⁸ He used typical romantic settings, suffering souls, fantasizing about the woods in the New World and included also sentimental discourses on the repressing of one nation by another which thought of its status to be higher or more important. Chateaubriand's hero Chactas makes a heated speech emphasizing the liberty of the nation:

“Je sais aussi les injustices des Blancs ; mon cœur s'en est affligé. Mais sommes-nous certains que nous n'avons rien à nous reprocher nous-même ? Avons-nous fait tout ce que nous avons pu pour demeurer libre ?”⁹⁹

The idea of a romantic movement was that the writer had a mission; that he was some kind of a magus who was charged to tell the people the right way of wisdom and to depict the ideal and future state of the society.¹⁰⁰

Chateaubriand, similarly as Cooper, was sometimes criticised for being overly sympathetic towards the Natchez Indians. Nevertheless, he described the Natchez Indians as “[I]es vilains enfants, de vrais sauvages, paresseux et mal élevés, d'un appétit

⁹⁸ Gerald Izenberg, *Impossible Individuality: Romanticism, Revolution, and the Origins of Modern Selfhood, 1787-1802* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992) 240

⁹⁹ Chateaubriand *Les Natchez* 192 “I also know the injustice of white men; my heart is grieved. But are we sure that we have nothing to reproach ourselves for? Have we done everything we could to remain free?”

¹⁰⁰ Claude Péchois, *Littérature française, le XVIII^e siècle 1778-1820* (Paris: Arthaud, 1976) 35

vorace.”¹⁰¹ He based his narration on the actual voyage but there was nothing of realism in *Les Natches*. The massive epic served Chateaubriand as an indictment of the disintegration of the French society. Chateaubriand saw the Indians as representatives of the true nature of humanity. As it was already mentioned, Chateaubriand’s projections of the Native Americans constituted a contrast to the contemporary French bourgeoisie. Chateaubriand portrayed his Indian characters as pure creatures living in harmony with nature that were unfortunately misunderstood by white settlers who wanted to seize their lands.

The French society, being burdened by excessive codes and regulations of behaviour and social life, has reached a state from which Chateaubriand does not see any way out and he is disgusted by a debauchery and decay of human society. He opposed the Rousseau’s idea of the noble savage as he complemented the scale of character traits so “le bon sauvage” was no longer just innocent and pure. Even his female Indian characters did not have a combative attitude so much inherent in Indian nature. Ray Bay Billington even comments that Chateaubriand’s heroines were borrowed from European romanticism, fainting, blushing and “dissolving into Niagaras of tears at predictable intervals [...] All were radiantly beautiful with cheeks as white as dazzling ivory, hair of “veils of gold,” and garments fashioned from their rosy heels.”¹⁰² Cooper on the other hand was fascinated by the energy and potential that lied among the Native American tribes in North America. Living in peaceful coexistence with nature and wilderness, the nation was able to prosper and unleash its talent.¹⁰³ According to Richard Slotkin, Cooper used the wilderness and natural setting to emphasize the moral drama of the clash of two dominant cultures and the conflict between them.

¹⁰¹ Maurois, 113 “vicious children, real savages, lazy and rude, with a voracious appetite”

¹⁰² Billington 24

¹⁰³ Richard Slotkin in Cooper xxi

During the nineteenth century the theme of a “vanished American” became very popular and the Indians were perfect figures for the content of the national literature because they were associated with the nation which was connected with the distant past of the American continent but now was on the edge of extinction.¹⁰⁴ According to William Gilmore Simms, Indians were to be claimed as America’s Gauls and Goths; the predecessors of the nation.¹⁰⁵ Both Cooper and Chateaubriand thus tried to project the problems of the nation into the stories of Indian tribes and contrasted the current state of the society with that of the pure and innocent “children of the nature”. American continent opposed the European continent in its strength and independence; Europe was bound with conventions but America symbolized new opportunities and thus creative environment. However, Cooper and Chateaubriand each dealt with the theme with a different approach and by different literary means. Despite the artistic quality and fascinating and innovative theme of an epic of an old nation, Chateaubriand’s *Les Natchez* are nowadays almost forgotten by the reading public and the initial success of this immense novel was surpassed by the success of his later works, especially of his *The Genius of Christianity*.

¹⁰⁴ Sheckel 32

¹⁰⁵ Sheckel 8

Conclusion

One of the principles of the Americanism is the notion of challenge. Crèvecoeur named the early settlers to be the pilgrims, being driven by the need and want for new territories to fully expand and start a new way of life. Nevertheless, the exploration of the wilderness in the New World, especially in the Frontier region, had meant not only the possession of the new land but above all, it disrupted the routine lifestyle of many Indian tribes.

White settlers considered the Indians to be a threat because they were not accustomed to the traditions and manners of the Native Americans and because of the misunderstanding and misconception of the living conditions of Native Americans, white settlers considered Indians to be inferior, in a need of cultivation. The society was divided into two parties; those who wanted to secure the position of Indians and to protect the unique and exquisite culture and traditions of the Native Americans, and those who wanted to possess the fertile land which belonged to the Native Americans. The good relationships with the Indians were essential to maintain the commercial alliances and treaties. Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter to Captain Meriwether Lewis in 1803: “In all your intercourse with the natives, treat them in the most friendly and conciliatory manner which their own conduct will admit; allay all jealousies as to the object of your journey, satisfy them of its own innocence; make them acquainted with the position, extent, character, peaceable and commercial dispositions of the United States; of our wish to be neighbourly, friendly and useful to them.”¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, it had been sometimes the reluctance or inability to understand the Indian way of life which led to a number of armed conflicts and massacres and which also contributed to the common presuppositions and prejudices of Indians being

¹⁰⁶ Baron 19

illiterate and brutal creatures, torturing and devastating the white settlement. Even the early Puritans were afraid of the assimilation of Indians into the white society and vice versa. Therefore, great care was taken to keep satisfactory distance.¹⁰⁷ In general, the Indian wars in the 17th and 18th century and their forced removals in the 19th century are still considered to be a delicate and often painful issue in the history of the development and evolution of the new American society.

For the theme of this bachelor thesis two works of two authors were chosen, both dealing with the description of the Indian style of life. James Fenimore Cooper was a writer of a social progress and social transformation. Cooper concentrated on the portrayal of the Indian in the original environment and the clash between savagery and civilization which forced the Indian to adjust to some conditions or to reply in armed resistance. Having read the reports and works of early adventurers and ethnographers, Cooper mingled the obtained information with his own experience with the Indian tribes in the region of the Frontier and produced a series of novels commonly known as The Leatherstocking Tales.

The Last of the Mohicans, one of Cooper's most famous works, was written in 1826 and to these days, the vivid portrayal of Indian life, customs, and nature fascinates not only young readers but a vast reading public. Cooper was influenced by Sir Walter Scott and the genre of historical novel. Nevertheless, Cooper connected the genre of historical novel, dealing with an important event from the past of the nation, with the genre of romance. Therefore, the story of love of Uncas and Cora Munro on the background of an attack on Fort William Henry made *The Last of the Mohicans* a historical romance.

¹⁰⁷ Faragher, Hine 94

Cooper opposes civilization and savagery. His hero Uncas symbolizes the noble savage who is willing to sacrifice his own life in favour of Cora Munro. Magua, on the other hand, symbolizes the brutal Indian who wants to protect his land at any costs and who wants to destroy white intruders. Both Indians are confronted with white society being part of the Indian allies. Moreover, *The Last of the Mohicans* was influenced by the genre of captivity narrative which was very popular at these times. The story of a captured woman raised attraction, fascination, and also fears of a potential attack of Indians. Nevertheless, Cooper implies the possible union of these two completely different cultures. The Indian representative Uncas falls in love with Cora Munro. Unfortunately, the racial limitations of the society show us that the union between civilization and savagery is impossible and Uncas and Cora are sentenced to die at the end of the novel. Cooper thus supports the notion that the American society is not ready for the multicultural unions.

Even though Natty Bumppo chooses to live among the Indians, he still considers himself to be “without a cross”, thus, racially pure. He was able to adjust to the Indian way of life but has lived in the Indian society for such a long time that now, it is almost impossible for him to integrate into the white civilization. Even Hawkeye considers the peaceful assimilation of these two cultures to be out of question when he says that: “The white man has his difficulties in getting redskin habits, quite as much as the Indian in getting whiteskin ways. As for the real natur', it is my opinion that neither can actually get that of the other.”¹⁰⁸

Even though Cooper was very often accused of creating overly romantic characters in his works, he was on the other hand considered by many leading politicians to be a national novelist. Cooper has raised questions regarding the injustice toward the Native

¹⁰⁸ In Zhang

Americans. Moreover, during the nineteenth century, European continent started to be viewed as old and culturally overfull. The American continent represented on the other hand new possibilities, new opportunities, and above all, new cultural themes. The theme of the “vanishing American” pointed out the pitiful conditions of some Native American tribes. Brian W. Dippie has termed the theme of the vanishing American as a national “habit of thought” and *The Last of the Mohicans* is one of the best-known novels within this tradition.¹⁰⁹

The tension between civilization and savagery did not fascinate only American writers but also captured attention of writers in Europe. One of the most influential writers of the eighteenth century, René François de Chateaubriand, published in 1826 an immense epic in prose *Les Natchez*. Cooper was an author of the social transition. Chateaubriand can be considered to be an author of the cultural transition. The massacre of the Natchez Indians in 1729 by the French colonial troops and the portrayal of the Natchez Indians are complemented by two narrations. *Atala* is the narration of the old Indian chief Chactas who narrates his own experience with the disenchantment caused by love to René, a disillusioned and brooding young man who is adopted into the Natchez society. Moreover, it can be also stated that Chateaubriand was an author with an exquisite sense of the psychological insight. His characters spend days in solitude thinking of the course of the human life and the course of nature.

The portrayal of an Indian way of life is in Chateaubriand’s *Les Natchez* opposed to the rapidly changing French society. Chateaubriand was personally disillusioned by the French Revolution and was considering the possibility of the return of society to the “natural” state, represented by the life of the Native Americans. Therefore, his savages

¹⁰⁹ Sheckel 32

living in harmony with nature were contrasted with the French society bound with conventions and moral codes. Moreover, similarly to Cooper, Chateaubriand derived his story from earlier reports. Even Chateaubriand misused most of the information and combined it with his own personal experiences and memories. Finally, he created the image of the Indian society, cross-cultural relationships, and failed integration.

Being a critic of the social condition in France after the French Revolution, Chateaubriand projects his own views and attitudes into his characters. René is wandering in his own despair when he is driven to find new solutions to his own way of life in the New World, similarly to Chateaubriand who is wandering in America trying to understand the new French society. Nevertheless, even though Chateaubriand was able to sympathize with the Indian tribe, it can be stated that his attitude toward the mixing of races and the peaceful coexistence among white and Native American civilization was definitely similar to Cooper's. Chateaubriand declared that any mixed relationship or even marriage could not survive. Chactas wanted to marry Atala, which would mean a symbolical mixed marriage of Catholicism and Native American tradition. The marriage of René and Celuta crosses the borders between Native American and White, or European, civilization. In consequence, both relationships are doomed.

It can be said that the French were much more successful in adjusting to the Indian conditions. They had learnt how to live among Indian tribes, being forced by the mutual needs of cooperation. For most settlers, and even for Chateaubriand, the New World symbolized New Eden. Both Cooper and Chateaubriand wanted to depict the injustice executed on the Native Americans. Moreover, they were both able to sympathise with the Indian way of life. Nevertheless, both the accounts are given from the white perspective. Cooper and Chateaubriand confirmed that the interaction between races of different origin

and traditions were predicated on skin colour and culture.¹¹⁰ Even if the red man wanted to cross the borders between the two cultures, he was still considered to be an inferior member of a vanquished race. It is pitiable that such immense piece of art as Chateaubriand's *Les Natchez* nowadays lies in the dust of oblivion and is not studied and read as Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* as both works deserve attention and appraisal for the portrayal of the Indian characters, traditions, and nature.

¹¹⁰Mills 442-3

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