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The Deerslayer

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James Fenimore Cooper

With an Introduction by Donald E. Pease



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Introduction

With the publication of *The Deerslayer* in 1841, James Fenimore Cooper added the final installment to the continuous historical romance that would be known to posterity as "The Leather-Stocking Tales." After introducing his readers to Nathaniel Bumppo, an Indian-like backwoodsman on the verge of physical decrepitude in *The Pioneers* (1823), Cooper extended his career back to the years of the French and Indian Wars in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). Then, in an effort to endow Leather-Stocking, or Hawkeye, as Cooper's hero preferred to be called, with contemporary relevance, Cooper brought him forward to a period that almost coincided with his own in *The Prairie* (1827). Having followed the course of Hawkeye's adventures from the years of his middle age in *The Pioneers* backward in time to the years of his early maturity in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper terminated his career and buried him in *The Prairie*. But fourteen years after having laid him to rest, Cooper resurrected Leather-Stocking for appearances in *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* 1841. When asked to explain why he brought Hawkeye back for these posthumous adventures, Cooper answered that he was motivated by a "latent regard" for an as yet unwritten explanation of his character's origins.

That Cooper had not intended *The Pioneers* as the opening contribution to a five-part epic at the time of its publication in 1823 reveals the remarkable standing of the Leather-Stocking saga within the corpus of Cooper's works as well as within United States literary history. As the personification of the historical forces responsible for the transformation of a settler colony within the Anglo-American empire into the United States of America, Hawkeye's character participated in an American myth that was not wholly under Cooper's authorial

control. The order in which the novels were published conformed to the myth of the death and rebirth of the hero rather than Hawkeye's chronology. From the time of the publication *The Pioneers* in 1823, the Leather-Stocking saga projected an imaginary national tradition that Cooper felt compelled to continue. As he tracked Hawkeye's movement back and forth in time, Cooper's sagging literary reputation enjoyed the benefits of the regenerative forces that his literary invention personified.

In the century and a half that they have remained in print, Cooper's Leather-Stocking novels have provoked mixed responses from his critics. The novels have been praised for the broad-based appeal of the national mythology underpinning them, but Cooper has also been severely criticized for the infelicities of his prose. In an excoriating satire that he directed against Cooper's stylistic lapses, Mark Twain famously enumerated Cooper's violation of eighteen of the "nineteen rules governing literary art in the domain of romantic fiction." Twain cited passages from Cooper's novels that he described as examples of the author's use of the "showiest kind of book talk" to condescendingly incorporate the dialogues of characters he has assigned "the basest of base dialects." Twain concluded this diatribe with the observation that "Cooper wrote about the poorest English that exists in our language and that the English of *Deerslayer* is the very worst that even Cooper wrote."

Despite their chronological and stylistic irregularities, however, "The Leather-Stocking Tales" have passed along ideological assumptions that have become the foundation stones of U.S. literary history. The wilderness within which Cooper plotted Hawkeye's romantic quests served as a screen onto which he projected the national culture's guilts as well as its fears and desires. Positioned outside the normative control of the social order, Cooper's mythological wilderness opened onto a space wherein national fantasies became realities. Hawkeye's counterworld replaced the vexing facts of the real world with invented characters and events that were compatible with collective social hopes and prejudices.

In his preface to the 1841 version of *The Deerslayer*, Cooper had described it as the beginning act of a "five act drama" that placed Hawkeye's origins within a plot that would endow the themes, characters, and events of the preceding four acts with

a sense of completion. But in the preface that he composed for the 1850 edition of the novel, Cooper replaced the persona of dramatist with that of the curator of a national heritage who was destined to "outlive himself" and who would supply his readers with a vision of the nation's origins and destiny.

From the opening paragraph of *The Deerslayer*, Cooper attempted to drape his historical account of the colonial origins of the young nation with the trappings of a venerable tradition:

On the human imagination, events produce the effects of time. Thus, he who has travelled far and seen much, is apt to fancy that he has lived long; and the history that most abounds in important incidents, soonest assumes the aspect of antiquity. In no other way can we account for the venerable air that is already gathering around American annals. When this mind reverts to the earliest days of colonial history, the period seems remote and obscure, the thousand changes that thicken along the links of recollection, throwing back the origin of the nation to a day so distant as seemingly to reach the mists of time; and yet four lives of ordinary duration would suffice to transmit, from mouth to mouth, in the form of tradition, all that civilized man has achieved within the limits of the republic.

In this passage, Cooper calls attention to the temporal anomaly attending the place of the United States within world history. The United States seemed to have already been imagined within immemorial past of civilization itself. Rather than limiting its time of existence to colonial history, Cooper invested the narrative that explained the events that took place in *The Deerslayer* with a manifold of historical associations that linked the origins of the nation to a time "so distant as seemingly to reach the mists of time."

The symbolic national tradition that Cooper invented within the pages of "The Leather-Stocking Tales" enabled him to fashion imaginary resolutions for the seemingly intractable political dilemmas—setting yeoman farmers against land speculators, abolitionists against the slave power, inheritors of property against the settlers who expropriated Indian lands, settled families in the east against itinerant homesteaders in the west—that confronted Cooper's readers. "The Leather-Stocking Tales"

played a comparable role for Cooper, who faced a version of these vexing national issues in his personal life.

Cooper was born in 1789 in Burlington, New Jersey. He moved as an infant to the township near Lake Otsego, New York, that continues to bear his family's name. His father, Judge William Cooper, was a landowner much beloved by his tenants, who grew wealthy through careful speculation. But after Susan Delancey accepted his marriage proposal, Cooper dedicated himself to bettering his social and economic position. Compared to the Delanceys, the Coopers were social climbers. Allied through former marriages with the Heathcotes, Schuylers, and Van Cortlandts, the Delanceys were one of the great families of New York. Although as loyalists the family had lost most of its property following the Revolutionary War, the Delancey name remained prominent enough to command almost universal deference. When he compared it with the Heathcote Hall, in which his wife, Susan Augusta Delancey, had grown up, the "Cooperstown" of James Fenimore's infancy seemed a frontier settlement more comparable to the Templeton of *The Pioneers* than to the Delanceys' opulent estate.

Cooper's precarious social standing became a serious problem just after his marriage to Susan Delancey, when his father's estate was heavily encumbered and an economic downturn depleted Cooper's meager savings. Without the capital to support his father's estate, he lost it. After he lost the estate that enabled him to take care of his family, Cooper began to feel like a social outcast rather than a respected member of the Delancey family.

Despite the fact that his writing had become Cooper's sole means of supporting himself and his family, the setting for Cooper's first novel, *Precaution*, had very little to do with the economic and political difficulties in which Cooper was then embroiled. When Cooper started work on the novel in 1819, he did so in an effort to win a bet with his wife, Susan, who had wagered that he could not write a better novel about English manners than those already in the literary marketplace. The result was *Precaution*, a self-consciously literary work about manners and social pretensions.

But *Precaution* did not merely confirm Cooper's belief in his ability to write. While working on the novel, Cooper became in-

creasingly conscious of the political and cultural differences of the social orders within England and the United States. Upon dedicating himself to the task of exploring these differences in his second novel, *The Spy* (1821), Cooper discovered the subject that would preoccupy his imagination for the next thirty years.

The events Cooper described in *The Spy: A Tale of Neutral Ground* took place in Westchester County in New York State. The “neutral ground” referred to in the book’s subtitle was situated in between the American and British camps during the Revolutionary War. While the inhabitants of this space were exempt from the military and civil jurisdictions of both combatants, their unusual juridical standing did not prevent them from abiding by alternative codes of their own design. In the process of evaluating his characters’ rules of conduct, Cooper singled out Harvey Birch as the representative of a code of behavior that was especially praiseworthy.

A prototype of Natty Bumppo, Harvey Birch differed from the novel’s other characters in that he was not divided in his loyalties. Birch did not construe the neutral ground as a territory that could be won or lost in war. He described it as a realm that transcended revolutionary conflict. Although he pretended to be a British spy, Harvey Birch was in fact loyal to the revolutionaries’ cause. But rather than describing the rules of conduct to which he adhered in terms of his opposition to British tyranny, as had the revolutionaries, Birch represented himself as bound by the principles of liberty and social justice that he purported to have discerned at work in the “nature” of the neutral ground that he inhabited.

At the time Cooper wrote *The Spy*, the Revolution had been transposed from an event in United States history into a mythos whose metaphors controlled the formulation of seemingly every contemporary political issue. When the particulars of the urgent political questions of Cooper’s day were translated into the terms compatible with the revolutionary mythos, they assumed the form of a transhistorical operation that set an oppressed population in a relation of opposition to a tyrannical oppressor. But in 1821, the political questions troubling Cooper’s readers were very different from those that preoccupied the generation of the nation’s founders. The vexed and

intertwined questions concerning the disposition of the western territories, the national bank, women's suffrage, slavery, the recent economic depression, and the Indian wars could not be reduced to the binaristic reasoning underpinning the revolutionary mythos.

Cooper situated the characters and actions that he invented for *The Pioneers* within the colonial past rather than the Revolutionary era. Then he represented the recalcitrant political questions challenging his contemporaries as having already been confronted and resolved within the pre-Revolutionary past in the dispute between the Temple and Effingham families. As it happened, the members of these two families bore uncanny similarities to members of Cooper's extended family. Judge Marmaduke Temple was like Cooper's father in that he governed his settlement by extolling the virtue of commerce. Major Effingham resembled Cooper's father-in-law in that both men were loyalists during the Revolutionary War, and both men believed in the authority of inherited position guaranteed by property.

Cooper resolved the dispute between the Temples and Effinghams by exposing the limitations in the perspectives of the ruling patriarchs of both families. Cooper accomplished this exposé by identifying with the viewpoint of the protagonist of the novel, Natty Bumppo. An imaginary descendant of Harvey Birch, Natty Bumppo's loyalty to a code of behavior that he described as ordained by the laws of nature prevented him from aligning with the causes of either the Temples or the Effinghams.

Natty Bumppo's cultural value resided in his power to represent the political disputes that plagued Cooper and his contemporaries as having already been fully resolved during the colonial period. But the resolution that Cooper's literary invention had effected in the conflict between the man of commerce and the man of property was not confined to the plane of ideological abstractions. The novel's unexpectedly high sales had also released Cooper from the financial problems troubling his personal life. The market success of *The Pioneers* empowered Cooper to recover his father's estate. The ancestral patriarch that Cooper had imagined in Hawkeye also enabled him to feel equal to his father-in-law's lineage.

In the years following *The Pioneers*, Cooper invented a tradition for his imaginary ancestor that he located within the time of the French and Indian Wars. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper addressed the moral concerns raised by the government's "Indian Removal" policies that mandated the expropriation of indigenous peoples from the territories they occupied. Cooper's imaginary solution for these moral quandaries involved his division of the tribes of Indians into factions setting the vanishing Mohican tribe in a relation of moral superiority to every other tribe on the continent. Cooper thereafter replaced the questions concerning the legality of the United States's usurpation of Indian lands with an evaluation of the contrasting moral character of the disputants. Following his erection of a moral boundary that separated the Mohican warriors Chingachgook and Uncas from the rest of the Native American peoples, Cooper supplied the governmental policy of Indian removal with a moral warrant. Cooper's resolution of the land dispute between indigenous peoples and the United States government proposed that as the representatives of the only morally righteous Indian tribe remaining on the continent, the Mohicans Chingachgook and Uncas were also the only Indians with a legal right to American land. Overall, Cooper's novel invented a legal fiction that encouraged his readers to believe that white settlers had inherited legal title for their property from a vanished Indian tribe.

In *The Prairie* (1827), Cooper constructed a similar distinction to differentiate Hawkeye's civilized devotion to the land from the barbarities of the Bush family. The Bushes were "squatters" who moved to the western territories, but they were unlike Natty Bumppo in that they lacked an understanding of the ways—what Cooper called the "spirit"—of the western lands. Cooper bequeathed Bumppo's "spirit" to his readers as a national legacy before burying him in *The Prairie*.

Bumppo fulfilled Cooper's readers' need for exemplary cultural antecedents. In writing about Natty Bumppo, Cooper simultaneously wrote with all of the cultural capital that his literary invention had afforded him. Following the publication of *The Prairie*, Cooper had become Leather-Stocking's sole living heir. He was the sole claimant as well to the vast collective will comprising the readership of "The Leather-Stocking

Tales.” Cooper took full advantage of both legacies when he traveled through the salons and capitals of Europe from 1827 to 1833. As the author of *Precaution*, Cooper had become acquainted with the class hierarchies of European high society. And as the heir of Leather-Stocking, Cooper positioned himself as the representative of a literary tradition that was revered throughout Europe’s most elite social circles.

But the aristocratic demeanor that Cooper assumed during his European tour provoked disapproval at home that was widespread enough to compel him to return to the Leather-Stocking saga for redress. Cooper’s decline in popularity reached its low point in 1838 when a group of Whig editors, led by Thurlow Weed, accused Cooper of having more in common with Europe’s landed aristocracy than American democracy. These Whig men of letters found allies among some of Cooper’s own neighbors. In what was popularly known as the “Three Mile Controversy,” his fellow townsmen disputed Cooper’s proprietorial right to turn tourists away from Three Mile Point, a picturesque spot on his estate that had become a favored site among picnickers.

Whereas the market success of his literary invention had enabled Cooper to recover Cooperstown as his ancestral estate in 1836, the continued popularity of Bumpo’s character had elevated Cooper into the social preeminence that solicited the Whigs’ condemnation. Cooper pursued the Whig editors into the courtroom where he sued them successfully for libel. But he defended his rights as a landowner in political pamphlets, in newspaper editorials, and on the pages of *The Deerslayer*. In turning *The Deerslayer* into one of the conduits of his legal defense, Cooper cited Natty Bumpo’s relationship to this landscape to argue his case for the sole proprietorship of his landholdings.

Before he could identify Natty Bumpo as a legal precedent, however, Cooper had to alienate Leather-Stocking from his opponents’ appropriation of his character. Following the publication of *The Last of the Mohicans* in 1826, Cooper’s mythological frontiersman had become a figure in the popular imagination against which all subsequent representations of the frontier backwoodsman were compared. So when he returned to the saga of Leather-Stocking in 1840, Cooper did so in part out of

a need to distinguish his literary invention from the characters in literature and politics and on the western frontier who had invoked Hawkeye as the authority for their self-fashioning.

In *The Pathfinder*, Cooper deviated from the narrative formula he had followed in the previous novels within the Leather-Stocking series. Published a year earlier than *The Deerslayer*, *The Pathfinder* recovered the unqualified affection of Cooper's readers by explaining how his frontier hero failed to win the heart of the only woman he truly loved. By representing him as willing to sacrifice the frontier code to start a family with Mabel Dunham, Cooper affiliated Bumpo's character with the "feminized" reading public's demand for an affirmation of the values of hearth, home, and romantic love. However, after she gave expression to her preference for Jasper Western, Mabel Dunham's rejection elevated Natty Bumpo into a figure of pathos whose values appeared compatible with those of the leading men in the most popular sentimental romances.

By including *The Pathfinder* within the prevailing structure of romantic conventions, Cooper also thoroughly democratized Hawkeye's character. But after having restored his readers' unqualified affection for this star-crossed lover in *The Pathfinder*, Cooper was free to return Leather-Stocking to his preferred code of behavior. *The Deerslayer* reversed the romantic formula at work in *The Pathfinder*. The action took place in the wilderness surrounding Cooper's estate where Hawkeye warned the Hutterers, a family that lived within an ark that is camped there, of an impending Indian war. The plot involved these characters in a ritual round of captivities and rescues and *Deerslayer's* possible marriage to the "lady of the lake," Judith Hutter. Whereas Natty Bumpo demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice his values for Mabel Dunham in *The Pathfinder*, the *Deerslayer* rejected the marriage proposal of the novel's female protagonist. But in rejecting her, Natty Bumpo did not surrender either his newly won identity as a self-sacrificing romantic hero or the pathos attending it. His rationale for rejecting Judith Hutter was that she was not sacrificing enough.

But Cooper also wrote the novel to produce a symbolic warrant for his legal rights to the supervision of his family estate. *The Deerslayer* provided Cooper with this symbolic warrant

when, upon discovering his warrior identity at the very center of Cooper's estate, Hawkeye asserted that "This very spot would be all of creation to me!" Hawkeye's demonstration of the ability to read the creator's signs within the precincts of Cooper's property justified Cooper's appropriation of Hawkeye's creation as his real estate. By staging the origins of his literary property on his family property, Cooper founded his legal title to both properties on the site at which they coincided.

In the previous novels in Cooper's Leather-Stocking series, Natty Bumppo distinguished the wilderness he inhabited from the "property" enclosed within the frontier settlements. But by 1841, the contradictions that Cooper invoked Hawkeye to resolve were structured in the difference between the property to which a descendant was legally entitled and the property over which homesteaders were empowered to claim squatters' rights. Cooper distinguished the right from the wrong way to own property in a conversation between Hurry March and Natty Bumppo in the second chapter of *The Deerslayer*. As they canoed down Lake Glimmerglass and a view opened on to the valley and bays to the south, the extravagant beauty of the vista was lost on March, but it inspired Bumppo to reflect upon its moral significance. "The lake seems made to let us get an insight into the noble forests; and land and water alike, stand in the beauty of God's providence!" Despite his insight into the moral significance of this vista, however, Natty Bumppo nevertheless gave expression to his envy of the man who owned the property upon which he had just undergone this spiritually uplifting perception. "I envy that man!" Bumppo explained his attitude toward the land's owner, Tom Hutter. "I know it's wrong, and I strive ag'in the feeling, but I envy that man!"

Throughout the remainder of the novel, "nature" will educate Bumppo in how not to envy what does not belong to him. After he learned this lesson, Hawkeye specified envy as the dominant trait in the characters—Tom Hutter, Rivenoak, Henry March—whose example Bumppo did not wish to follow. In contradistinction to envy, Bumppo identified loyalty to his friends as the ruling motive for his actions. Bumppo exemplified this virtue after the Huron chief Rivenoak asked him why he risked his life to rescue the Delaware woman Wah-ta!-Wah from the Hurons: "I got here by nothing stronger than fre'nd-

ship; which is strong enough for such as are not niggardly of their feelin's, and are willing to live a little for their fellow creatur's, as well as from themselves."

Rather than continuing to covet Tom Hutter's property, Bumpo struck up a relationship with Hutter's daughter, Judith, who, along with her sister, Hetty, was the putative heir of Hutter's estate. Their relationship became the basis for a series of ordeals through which Hawkeye discovered the power to distinguish material gifts—like the carved elephants that Judith found in her father's pirated chest and that Hawkeye gave to the Hurons in exchange for the freedom of Hurry Harry and Tom Hutter—from spiritual gifts—evident in his refusal to evaluate fellow human beings in terms of the material goods for which they might be exchanged.

Hawkeye displayed these powers of discrimination through the limits he placed on the exchanges he was willing to undertake with Rivenoak, the chief of the Huron tribe who declared war on the white settlers along Lake Glimmerglass. Hawkeye readily acceded to Rivenoak's request that he exchange carved ivory elephants for the men Rivenoak held hostage. But Cooper represented Hawkeye's willingness to risk his life to rescue Wah-ta!-Wah from Huron captivity and to defend the Hutters' property against the Hurons' attack as superior to strictly material exchanges in that it evidenced a code of moral behavior in which loyalty and self-sacrifice supplanted envy and pride as fundamental social motives.

While he was on this dual mission, the Hurons captured Bumpo, then let him out on a "furlough." A "furlough," Bumpo explained to the Hutter family, "is when a man has leave to quit a camp, or a garrison for a sartain specified time; at the end of which he is to come back and shoulder his musket, or submit to his torments, just as he may happen to be a solider, or a captyve." Unlike Hawkeye, Judith Hutter believed Hawkeye foolish to make good on his promise to return to the Huron camp after having been let out. She discriminated between a furlough as service to the military and a furlough as service to enemy captors. But Natty Bumpo did not recognize Judith Hutter's distinction. For him a furlough was obtained through the exchange of his word for his freedom. In Hawkeye's estimation, his word participated in the freedom that it

also signified. The pledge to return was founded upon the property in himself that Hawkeye called his character as well as the duties to which he had devoted his character.

After Judith Hutter asked him why he felt obliged to return to what promised to be certain torment, he used the question to distinguish his character from that of the other frontiersman in the novel, Henry March. Cooper distinguished March from Hawkeye through negative references to March's outward appearance—he was unkempt in his dress and boisterous in manner—and through a condemnation of his behavior—March killed animals for sport rather than meat, and he slaughtered Indian men as well as Indian women and Indian children for the price their scalps would bring him.

Cooper initiated his account of the differences between Henry March from Natty Bumppo by reporting on the different nicknames that were conferred upon each of these frontiersmen. Judith's religiously devout yet simpleminded sister, Hetty, was the only female character who preferred Hurry March to Hawkeye. Cooper associated Hetty's fascination with Hurry Harry with her unreflective moral sentiment. At the outset of the novel, Bumppo told Hetty Hutter that at different times in his life, the Delaware tribe in which he was raised had called him by various names—"Straight-tongue," "The Pigeon," "Lap-ear"—but that he was now called "The Deerslayer." Leather-Stocking had earned these different names through the acts of sagacity and physical prowess that he displayed while within the tribal council or on a hunt. Each name that he acquired after undergoing these trials conferred a name value upon one or another of the mental and physical capabilities that he referred to as his "gifts." However, since Leather-Stocking remained ignorant of his "gifts" until he passed through these ordeals, the circumstances that led to the change in his name were as significant as the names themselves.

The difference between the names "Deerslayer" and "Hawkeye" indicated the transmutation in Leather-Stocking's identity from the condition of being a hunter to that of a warrior. The name "Deerslayer" referred to the animal he killed when he displayed his hunting abilities. "Deerslayer" called attention to the alacrity and skill with which Leather-Stocking tracked and killed a deer. The man known as "Deerslayer" became "Hawk-

eye" only after he underwent an experience in which he had no recourse other than killing another man to defend his own life. The name "Hawkeye" was itself intended to convey the process of moral discrimination that "Deerslayer" undertook before the decision to take the life of another man. "Hawkeye" also celebrated the keen eye and careful aim that Leather-Stocking exercised when he did finally kill a man.

All of these traits—the discrimination, the reticence, and the care at his command—established the contrast between his character and that of Henry March.

It would not have been easy to find a more noble specimen of vigorous manhood, than was offered in the person of him who called himself Hurry Harry. His real name was Henry March, but the frontiersmen having caught the practice of giving *sobriquets*, from the Indians, the appellation of Hurry was far oftener applied to him than his proper designation, and not unfrequently he was termed Hurry Skurry, a nickname he had obtained from a dashing, reckless, off-handed manner and a physical recklessness that kept him so constantly on the move, as to cause him to be known along the whole line of scattered habitations that lay between the provinces and the Canadas. The stature of Hurry Harry exceeded six feet four, and being unusually well proportioned, his strength fully realized the idea created by his gigantic frame. The face did no discredit to the rest of the man, for it was both good-humoured and handsome. His air was free, and though his manner necessarily partook of the rudeness of border life, the grandeur that pervaded so noble a physique prevented it from becoming altogether vulgar.

This passage supported the legendary status of Henry March by elaborating upon the aliases attending the frontier legend's given name. As Cooper made clear in this passage, the nicknames his peers conferred upon a character carried more authority in establishing his identity than did his birth name. In calling him "Hurry Skurry," his fellow frontiersmen recognized Henry March's recklessness, and quietly admonished themselves against following his example. To others, including Henry March himself, his haste became sufficiently identified with his "nature" to become the true first name of Hurry Harry.

In distinguishing Hawkeye's character from Henry March's, Cooper designated the differences between the Leather-Stocking in his tales and the frontiersman from popular legend. The distinctions that Cooper adduced between Hawkeye and Hurry March in *The Deerslayer* elevated Hawkeye to a public position superior to that of other frontiersmen, like Davy Crockett and Ned Buntline, who had won the reading public's admiration for acting upon qualities they shared in common with Hurry Harry. When he registered these distinctions, Cooper also removed a weapon from the arsenal of his enemies. The Whigs had invoked the popular version of the frontiersman to denounce Cooper as a landed aristocrat. And some of Cooper's more literate neighbors actually cited Natty Bumppo's dispute with Judge Temple in *The Pioneers* in advancing the public's claim to the use of Three Mile Point.

Hawkeye articulated the distinction between his values and the frontiersman's in the same scene in which he explained the significance of the furlough: "As for March, he doesn't care enough about any creatur' but hisself . . . for he thinks more of his gains than of even his own word. As for my promises, or your'n, Judith, or any body else's, they give him no consarn." In this passage Hawkeye made it clear that the promises, covenants, and bonds he established with others constituted the only character he honored.

But if his covenants formed the basis for the property Hawkeye produced in himself, they also formed the only legal basis for the right to own property that Hawkeye would recognize. Different versions of this bond formed the bases for Hawkeye's relationship to Chingachgook, as well as his furlough and his defense of the Hutter's ark. Throughout *The Deerslayer*, the relationship between honored covenants and legal ownership of property was reiterated so often and in so many different contexts that properly honored covenants seemed the essence of legal property. Analogously, a refusal to honor a bond becomes the basis for the loss of property.

The loss of property assumed various forms in *The Deerslayer*. But the most significant loss concerned the bond of matrimony Judith Hutter wanted but Hawkeye did not. Hawkeye's rejection of Judith reversed the sentimental formula at work in *The Pioneers*. Rather than finding a woman to compensate Hawkeye