THE
AMERICAN
NOVEL

剑桥美国小说新论·29
（英文影印版）

New Essays on

The Last of the Mohicans

《最后的莫希干人》新论

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导 读

北京大学英语系教授 陶洁

近年来,美国文学在我国很受欢迎。大专院校英语系纷纷开设美国文学选读和专题课,学生从中学到的大部分内容是美国小说。不仅如此,在本科毕业论文、硕士论文或博士论文方面,学生所选题材也大多为关于某部美国小说或某个美国小说家。然而,我们的学生往往热衷理论而对作品或作家缺乏深入细致的了解和分析。他们往往先大谈理论规则,然后罗列一些例证,不能很好地把理论和文本融会贯通,恰如其分地结合在一起。在这种情况下,我们需要一些好的参考资料来帮助学生更好地认识和理解他们在阅读或研究的作品和作家。《剑桥美国小说新论》正是这样一套优秀的参考书。

这套丛书的负责人是曾经主编过《哥伦比亚美国文学史》的艾默里·埃利奥特教授,并且由英国剑桥大学出版社在上世纪80年代中期开始陆续出书,至今仍在发行并出版新书,目前已有五十多种,不仅出平装本还有精装本。一套书发行二十多年还有生命力,估计还会继续发行,主要因为它确实从学生的需要出发,深受他们和教师的喜爱。

《剑桥美国小说新论》的编排方式比较统一。根据主编制定的原则,每本书针对一部美国文学历史上有名望的大作家的一本经典小说,论述者都是研究这位作家的知名学者。开篇是一位权威专家的论述,主要论及作品的创作过程、出版历史、当年的评价以及小说发表以来不同时期的主要评论和阅读倾向。随后是四到五篇论述,从不同角度用不同的批评方法对作品进行分析和阐

释。这些文章并非信手拈来,而是专门为这套丛书撰写的,运用的理论都比较新,其中不乏颇有新意的真知灼见。书的最后是为学生进一步学习和研究而提供的参考书目。由此可见,编书的学者们为了帮助学生确实煞费苦心,努力做到尽善尽美。

这五十多种书有早期美国文学家库珀的《最后的莫希干人》,也有当代试验小说大师品钦的《拍卖第49号》和厄普代克那曾被《时代》杂志评为1923年以来100部最佳小说之一的《兔子,跑吧!》;有我们比较熟悉的麦尔维尔的《白鲸》,也有我们还不太了解的他的《漂亮水手》;有中国学生很喜欢的海明威的长篇小说《永别了,武器》,令人想不到的是还有一本论述他所有的短篇小说的集子。有些大作家如亨利·詹姆斯、威廉·福克纳等都有两三本作品入选,但它们都分别有专门的集子。丛书当然涉及已有定论的大作家,包括黑人和白人作家(可惜还没有华裔作家的作品),但也包括20世纪70年代妇女运动中发掘出来的如凯特·肖邦的《觉醒》和佐拉·尼尔·赫斯顿的《他们眼望上苍》,甚至还有我国读者很熟悉的斯托夫人的《汤姆叔叔的小屋》。当年这部小说曾经风靡美国,在全世界都有一定的影响,后来被贬为"政治宣传"作品,从此在美国文学史上销声匿迹。70年代后随着要求扩大文学经典中女性和少数族裔作家的呼声日益高涨,人们才开始重新评价这部作品,分析它对日后妇女作家的影响、对黑人形象的塑造,甚至它在美国文学的哥特式传统中的地位等等。

这样的例子还有很多,例如威廉·迪恩·豪威尔斯和他的《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》。以前人们只肯定他在发展现实主义文学和理论方面的贡献,对他的作品除了《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》评价都不太高。但在这本新论文集子里编者对已有定论进行挑战,强调豪威尔斯的小说、他的现实主义跟当时的社会经济文化现状有很大的关系。他的小说既有其文学形式,又是一种社会力量。另外一位19世纪新英格兰作家萨拉·奥尼·裘威特过去一向被看成是乡土作家,现在学者们用女性主义观点强调她的《尖枞树之乡》对美国文学的贡献,分析当年的种族、民族主义和文学市场

对她写作的影响。用封底宣传语言来说,这本集子对美国文学研究、女性主义批评理论和美国研究等方面都会引起很大的兴趣。

还有一本书似乎在我们国家很少有人提起过——亨利·罗思的《就说是睡着了》。此书在20世纪30年代曾经风靡一时,此后长期销声匿迹,60年代又再度受到推崇。现在这部小说则是上面提到的《时代》杂志100部优秀小说中的一部,被认为是上个世纪头50年里最为出色的美国犹太小说、最优秀的现代主义小说之一。评论家认为集子里的文章采用心理分析、社会历史主义等批评方法探讨了有关移民、族裔和文化归属等多方面的问题。

这套集子里还出现了令人信服的新论点。很长时间内海明威一直被认为是讨厌女人的大男子主义者。但在关于他的短篇小说的论述里,作者通过分析《在密执安北部》,令人信服地证明海明威其实对妇女充满同情。不仅如此,这一论断还瓦解了海明威在《太阳照样升起》中充分暴露他的厌女症的定论。

然而,作者们并不侈谈理论或玩弄理论名词,所有的论断都是既以一定的理论为基础,又对文本进行深入的分析;既把理论阐述得深入浅出,又把作品分析得丝丝入扣,让人不由得不信服。他们能够做到这一点完全是因为他们了解学生的水平和需要。

我认为《剑桥美国小说新论》是一套很好的参考书。北京大学出版社购买版权,出版这套书是个有益于外国文学研究教学的决定。

Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretation has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many American novels had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening,* which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical guides to

American novels now widely read and studied. Each volume is devoted to a single novel and begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the novel's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of the American novel, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott
University of California, Riverside

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Introduction

H. DANIEL PECK

THE *Last of the Mohicans* is a pivotal work in James Fenimore Cooper's first, remarkable decade of authorship, the 1820s, and in his career as a whole. This was his sixth novel, published in 1826, and its setting and themes are anticipated by several of the works that precede it. Following his first book, an unsuccessful novel of manners called *Precaution* (1820), Cooper found his form, materials, and indeed, his audience, with *The Spy* (1821), a tale of the American Revolution set in the rocky highlands above colonial New York City. Like Washington Irving's work of the same period, this novel demonstrated that American settings and history (George Washington figures in the novel's action) could be made to serve fiction. Although this novel's paradigms of character, plot, and setting derived from Sir Walter Scott ("the American Scott" is an appellation Cooper never liked, and did not outlive), Cooper filled the paradigms with his own distinctive elements.

Most important, he adapted Scott's setting of the "neutral ground," a disputed territory contested by two or more warring parties, to the American landscape. In *The Spy*, this landscape is characterized by a ruggedness that obscures human lines of demarcation and often defeats the attempts of the characters to command its difficult terrain. Out of this setting is born a hero whose uncanny ability to successfully negotiate the landscape defines his heroism. Harvey Birch, a counterspy serving the American forces, is Cooper's first great mythic character. In this figure of daring, skill, and perceptual acuity, Cooper created the model for his Leatherstocking hero.

The Leatherstocking hero, however, as he first emerged in Cooper's fiction, is hardly the equal of Harvey Birch. In *The Pi-*

oneers, the writer's third novel, published in 1823, Natty Bumppo is an aged woodsman living near Templeton, a frontier settlement drawn from Cooper's childhood memories of Cooperstown. With his Indian companion Chingachgook (known as Indian John in this novel), Natty Bumppo serves primarily to remind the community of its "wasty ways," its mindless destruction of the natural environment; he represents a commitment to the wilderness which, the novel makes clear, is increasingly difficult to honor. Indeed, Natty's departure for the West at the novel's conclusion suggests the inevitability of change and the irrevocable nature of American "progress." The Leatherstocking of *The Pioneers*, essentially powerless before the emerging forces of civilization (his imprisonment in the stocks symbolizes this), is, in several ways, a marginal figure, one of the several frontier "characters" in the novel whose time has come and gone.

When Cooper took up the Leatherstocking figure again in *The Last of the Mohicans* three years later, removing his setting to the French and Indian War of the mid-eighteenth century, he returned him to vigorous middle age and gave him back the powers which had ebbed in *The Pioneers*. Contributing largely to the significance of *The Last of the Mohicans* is the emergence of the Leatherstocking as a fully realized frontier hero – the model for countless imitations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Adding further significance is that, in writing the novel, Cooper began to consider his hero as part of an ongoing series, a saga of frontier life in America.

Before he came to *The Last of the Mohicans*, however, Cooper published two other novels: *The Pilot* (1824), a highly successful tale of the sea, pitting American and British naval forces against one another during the Revolution, and *Lionel Lincoln* (1825), a story of revolutionary Boston whose mixture of gothicism and historical romance worked to ill effect. Despite their different degrees of success and different settings, however, both works presage *The Last of the Mohicans*.

The rugged and fog-shrouded shoreline of *The Pilot*'s English coastline, a further development of the disputed neutral ground, anticipates the dangerous, war-torn landscape of *The Last of the Mohicans*. The selfless courage of the seaman Tom Coffin suggests the simple nobility of Natty Bumppo, and the perceptual acuity of the novel's Byronic hero, John Paul Jones, anticipates the Leatherstocking's uncanny ability to successfully negotiate a setting of violence and conflict. In *Lionel Lincoln,* Cooper took the neutral ground to its most extreme limits, depicting a landscape so dangerously obscure that it becomes, in several of its key scenes, a world of nightmare. His rendering of the Battle of Bunker Hill prefigures, in its violence and confusion, the Massacre at Fort William Henry in *The Last of the Mohicans.*

By the time Cooper published *The Last of the Mohicans* in early February of 1826, he was already a celebrity in American literary circles. *The Spy, The Pioneers,* and *The Pilot* had been best-sellers and the immediate and extraordinary success of *The Last of the Mohicans* confirmed his reputation as the leading American novelist of his generation. When on June 1, 1826, four months after the book's publication, Cooper departed with his family for an extended European sojourn, he was a national hero. At this point, the next Leatherstocking tale was already under way; *The Prairie* was completed in Europe and published in 1827. Here Cooper took the aged hero of *The Pioneers* to an even more advanced age and to America's far West. In *The Prairie,* Natty Bumppo refers to events and characters from both *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans;* in several ways the novel recapitulates themes and ideas treated in the earlier works. With Natty's death at the conclusion of *The Prairie* came the end of the Leatherstocking saga, or so Cooper thought at the time.

Cooper spent seven years in Europe, returning home in 1833, and during his time away the nation's affection for him waned. His involvement in European political affairs, particularly the so-called Finance Controversy, had made him unpopular at home; and the novels treating the European past that he had written while abroad (*The Bravo* [1831], *The Heidenmauer* [1832], and *The Headsman* [1833]) were not popular, although these works implicitly celebrated American democracy by depicting Europe's dark, feudal past. Misunderstood and, in his opinion, unappreciated, Cooper returned to his homeland in a state of disaffection from which he never recovered.

The 1830s were marked by Cooper's further alienation from his native land. The full emergence of Jacksonian democracy brought with it leveling tendencies that threatened the landed gentry on whom America, in Cooper's view, depended for political and cultural leadership. Everywhere he looked, he saw narrow self-interest, greed, and a general breakdown of decorum in social life. Cooper's novel of 1838, *Home as Found,* dramatized this threat. In this work, the descendants of *The Pioneers'* Oliver and Elizabeth Effingham had become a beleaguered minority, struggling to defend their very survival as a class. That the novel dramatizes an actual event from Cooper's life during the 1830s – an attempt to reclaim his family's ownership of a public picnic area near Cooperstown – confirms that his sense of threat to America's gentry was deeply personal. Other work of this period, such as his allegorical novel, *The Monikins* (1835), has a strongly polemical quality, reflecting Cooper's dominant political and social concerns during the 1830s.

Then, in 1840, perhaps out of a need to retreat from the pressing difficulties of his public life (including a series of libel suits he brought against newspapers in this period) and also to recover his flagging reputation as a novelist, Cooper returned to the Leatherstocking series and to the genre that had made him famous, the historical romance. He brought Natty Bumppo back to life in *The Pathfinder,* set on and around Lake Ontario where Cooper himself had served in the U.S. Navy during his young manhood. Roughly the same age as he was in *The Last of the Mohicans,* Natty Bumppo is here characterized in softer terms. No longer the hard-hearted scout committed only to his duty, his "gifts," and his Indian companions, he falls in love. In this novel, Cooper explored the possibility of reconciling an ethos of wilderness adventure with one of domesticity. That the Leatherstocking fails to win the heroine, Mabel Dunham, and returns to the forest with his Indian companion Chingachgook suggests the impossibility in Cooper's mind of such a reconciliation.

The following year Cooper published *The Deerslayer,* taking his hero back to his youthful initiation into wilderness adventure. The setting, Lake Otsego (called the Glimmerglass in this novel), is the same as in the first-written of the Leatherstocking tales, *The Pioneers,* but in a period half a century earlier and predating white settlement. The historical remoteness and the wilderness setting, as well as the hero's youth, make *The Deerslayer* the most romantic of the Leatherstocking tales, and suggest the writer's need to repossess imaginatively a simpler world associated with his childhood in Cooperstown. With this novel, the Leatherstocking series was complete; in the hero's beginning was his end.

Cooper's prolific career continued for another decade, during which he published a number of important works, including the Littlepage trilogy (1845–46), a series of novels dramatizing the dispossession of the landed gentry in New York State during the Anti-Rent Wars, and *The Crater* (1847), a novel allegorizing the rise and fall of the United States. At the end of his life, however, Cooper himself knew that the Leatherstocking tales were the works for which he would be best remembered. What he may not have fully understood is the special place within the tales that *The Last of the Mohicans* would forever hold.

The immediate impetus for writing *The Last of the Mohicans* seems to have been a sight-seeing tour of the Hudson River that Cooper made with a group of young British noblemen during the autumn of 1824, encompassing West Point, Albany, Saratoga, and Ballston. Standing in the caverns at the picturesque Glens Falls, one of the British tourists, Edward Stanley, made a remark that Cooper seems to have taken as a challenge: "Here is the very scene for a romance." After the novel was published, Cooper saw to it that Stanley received a copy.[1]

If the novel grew, in part, from such a challenge, it would not have been uncharacteristic of Cooper. His imagination is primarily visual, and he responded deeply to the scenic aspects of landscape. For example, Susan Fenimore Cooper said that a sudden glimpse of Lake Otsego through the forest inspired her father to begin writing *The Deerslayer.*[2]

While the scene of Glens Falls may have served Cooper as the initial impetus for writing *The Last of the Mohicans*, the narrative and symbolic meanings he invested in this site, and in the novel's larger geography as well, came from his own interior landscape. That landscape, in all its rich complexity, has been the subject of much recent critical commentary, which has recognized *The Last of* *the Mohicans* as a key representation of the novelist's deepest personal and historical concerns. As Wayne Franklin points out in the present collection, Cooper's appropriation of Glens Falls, the setting for one of the novel's most riveting scenes, "depended on radical erasures." It involved Cooper's dreaming his way backward from the deteriorated falls and tourist structures he found at the site in 1824 to a true wilderness setting. The erasure and reconfiguration of the landscape, as Franklin shows, are among the deepest sources of Cooper's power as a novelist in *The Last of the Mohicans,* and in his other fiction as well.

In his first preface to *The Last of the Mohicans,* however, Cooper went out of his way to discourage such symbolic interpretations. This book, he said, was simply a "narrative," and he instructed readers not to seek within it "an imaginary and romantic picture of things" (p. 1). In doing this, Cooper was, in part, warning readers of refined taste, especially "young ladies" (p. 4), away from a work in which he had attempted to draw vividly some of the bloodiest scenes in American colonial history. His testimony regarding accurate representation, especially concerning American Indian tribes and their allegiances, is the singular focus of this first preface.[3]

Cooper's representations of history and Indian life (this was the first novel in which he had undertaken to treat Indians extensively) came under immediate attack in some contemporary reviews. A review in the May 1826 issue of the *London Magazine* referred to *The Last of the Mohicans* as "clearly by much the worst of Mr. Cooper's performances," and drew attention to the "[i]mprobabilities" of its action and characterizations. The American critic W. H. Gardiner was far more sympathetic in his treatment of the novel, but one of his criticisms was that it followed too faithfully the "wild traditions" of the missionary John Heckewelder. These, Gardiner argued, had led Cooper to present "altogether a false and ideal view of the Indian character." "We should be glad to know," he asked, "in what tribe, or in what age of Indian history, such a civilized warrior as Uncas ever flourished?"[4]

A similar attack came from a presumed authority, General Lewis Cass, an Indian fighter and agent, who, in 1828 said that Uncas has "no living prototype in our forests." Attacks such as these continued in the years following the publication of *The Last of the Mohicans,* and in 1835 the Philadelphia writer and dramatist William Bird published a novel, *Nick of the Woods,* intended, he said later, to debunk what he regarded as Cooper's idealized characterizations of Indians in *The Last of the Mohicans.* Even Francis Parkman, in his generally admiring survey of Cooper's works written soon after the novelist's death in 1852, said that Cooper's "Indian characters . . . it must be granted, are for the most part either superficially or falsely drawn."[5]

None of this diminished the novel's popularity with the reading public; for an entire century after its publication, it remained the most internationally acclaimed and widely translated of Cooper's works. Professional literary appraisals, however, continued throughout most of the nineteenth century to emphasize the ideality of Cooper's characterizations, and regularly caricatured his treatment of the Indians. Mark Twain's famous essay, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," is merely the most ingenious in a long series of attacks on the credibility of Cooper's representations.

Both Cooper and *The Last of the Mohicans* did have their notable defenders during this period. The American novelist William Gilmore Simms, whose *The Yemassee* (1835) may be considered a counterpart to *The Last of the Mohicans* in its mournful treatment of Indian dispossession in the South, praised Cooper for his "[inimitable] details of Indian art and resource." Honoré de Balzac, in his warm appreciation of Cooper published in 1840, ranked *The Last of the Mohicans* among the seven works of the novelist which he said "are his unique and rightful claim to fame."[6]

The first fully analytical attempts to rescue Cooper, and *The Last of the Mohicans,* from caricature had to await the early twentieth century. W. C. Brownell's perceptive essay on Cooper in his 1909 *American Prose Masters* is the most important of such efforts. In acknowledging that the "verisimilitude of Cooper's Indians has been the main point of attack of his caricaturing critics," Brownell countered, "it is the fact that the so-called 'noble red man,' whom he is popularly supposed to have invented, does not exist in his books at all. Successful or not, his Indians, like his other characters, belong to the realm of attempted portraiture of racial types,