

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I.1. Background of the Study

James Fenimore Cooper is a famous American writer who has come to be recognized as America's first great social historian (Call-Dur 603). The writer is interested in him after reading one of his series novels of Leatherstocking Tales, *The Last of the Mohicans*. It makes the writer curious to know what kind of person James Fenimore Cooper is. According to Call-Dur in his book, *Critical Survey of Long Fiction*:

His novels span American History, dramatizing central events from Columbus' discovery (*Mercedes of Castile*) through the French and Indian

Wars and the early settlement (*The Leatherstocking Tales*) to the Revolution (*The Spy* and *The Settlement*) and the contemporary events of the *Littlepage*, and the *Miles Wallingford* novels. Moreover, Cooper also reviewed the whole of American History, attempting to complete his particular vision of America by inventing a tradition for the new nation (605).

The words “the new nation” makes the writer wonder about the meaning of it. The question that appears in the writer’s mind is the stories must be based on his imagination about something against reality. Because he was disappointed with American’s society at that time. He indicated that he had found America much decayed on his return from Europe. It was seen when he turned to concerned criticism of American society that finally made his reputation began to decline (Call Dur 605). W.H Gardiner wrote in his article in *The North American*, 1826, he said that Cooper is considered as a novelist who fictionally presented a world of pure imagination (XXIII 166). Those achievements in writing make the writer believe that James Fenimore Cooper is a qualified writer and she is interested in choosing his novel in writing her thesis.

Furthermore, Cooper is best known as the author of *The Leatherstocking Tales*, for which critics agree that these are Cooper’s best novels (Call-Dur 603). *The Leatherstocking Tales: The Pioneer* (1823), *The Last of The Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841)_are series of novels in which the frontier hunter and scout, Natty Bumppo, is the central character. James Fenimore Cooper is a unique writer. The writer believes it is because the themes of the novels are similar. They talk

about good relationships between white men and the Indians. Gardiner calls this point “a world of pure imagination”. Usually in reality, white people and the Indians are enemies; they never can be unified. Yet, in Cooper’s work through his imagination, he describes that white men can do good things to the Indians. So, here he tries to describe his fictional imagination through one of his characters called, Natty Bumppo. He is a white man called Hawkeye but lives together with noble Indians, Chingachgook, and his son, Uncas in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Deeper than that reason is that *The Leatherstocking Tales* remain the most vivid performance of the vanishing frontier in American literature, projected dramatically through characters like Natty Bumppo (variously called the Deerslayer, Leatherstocking, Hawkeye), the Indians Chingachgook, and Uncas, and a host of white characters who preserve the American landscape as a “virgin land” (Gross 1137). The blending of the themes of *Leatherstocking Tales*, makes it very interesting to study. In addition, it also tells in “a clear cut the romantic type” which is the American moral ideal (Spiller 33). Because of Cooper’s reputation above and the predicate that he has, the writer is eager to study his works.

One of his works that the writer finds very interesting is his best-executed plot of the series, *The Last of the Mohicans* (Crawford 68). According to Oxford Learner’s Pocket Dictionary, executed comes from the words execute, which means kill as a legal punishment (144). So, this novel is revealing about the story of execution of Indian and the whites through their war. It describes how cruel the Indian’s way of killing their enemies by skinning their scalp, and Cooper described it very clear. Therefore, this novel has the best-executed plot.

The writer **also** finds out that *The Last of the Mohicans* took place in the frontier area around **Lake George** and the headwaters of the Hudson River in New York State. Before the writer continues further, *The Last of the Mohicans* is also the best known in *The Leatherstocking Tales*, probably because it combines Cooper's **most** interesting characters and the relatively fast-paced adventure of *The Spy* and *The Pilot*. Set in the French and Indian Wars, this novel presents Natty and **Chingachgook** in their prime. Chingachgook's son, Uncas is the last of the **Mohicans** chiefs, the last of the line from which the Delaware nation is said to trace their origins (Call-Dur 611). The story also describes Cooper's vision of a **new** America about a new unity of all races. The division between races is a **symptom** of a fallen world, in which it is described through Hawkeye as a protagonist who has a good relationship with the Indians, asserts that there is one God **over** all and, perhaps, one afterlife for all (612). Instead of being a protagonist, D.H Lawrence has described him as a mythic hero, a true democrat who accepts **everyone** according to his "gifts" and differences (Call-Dur 606). Meanwhile, **Kathryn** mentions that Natty is the idealized, upright individualist who is **better** than the society he protects. "Poor and isolated, yet pure; he is a touchstone **for** ethical values and prefigures Herman Melville's Billy Budd and Mark Twain's Huck Finn" (23).

The term "**mythic hero**" makes the writer curious about its definition, so she has tried to **find** the meaning of it. According to Rene Wellek in his book *Theory of Literature*, myth is a favorite term of modern criticism (such as D.H Lawrence). It points to an important area of meaning, shared by religion, folklore, **anthropology**, sociology, psychoanalysis, and fine arts. In some of its

habitual oppositions, it is contraposed to “history,” or to “science,” or to “philosophy,” or to “allegory,” or to “truth.” (195). He also adds, in seventeen and eighteen centuries, the Age of Enlightenment, myth had a connotation: a myth was a fiction_scientifically and historically untrue (195). Yet, it is characteristic of myth that it can be believed, whether true or false (Kennedy 623). Hence, the writer can get a conclusion about a “mythic hero.” The person is an idol or a legendary hero who fictionally represents something based on someone’s imagination, and it relates to someone’s belief. There is also another theory that says that heroes of myth are human prototypes (Kennedy 624). Since Cooper is a myth maker who not only weaves a fascinating fable but records the relationship of man and nature in a period when that relationship is surrendering to industrialism and to the destruction of the forest and plain, and Cooper also has a myth epic sensibility in his finest work (Gross 1136), his vision about America is revealed through his thought about equality. So, his myth also describes about equality of all races, beside about relation between man and nature. It makes this topic interesting to study.

Furthermore, the heroism that Cooper ascribes to Natty is, in truth, the heroism of Cooper himself (Morse 51), for he believes he has ended his *Leatherstocking Tales* by bringing together his themes and characters and clarifying the importance of Natty Bumppo to American civilization. Cooper has imagination about a new nation and in all his works; he continues to express his faith in the possibility of a high American civilization that finally creates Hawkeye as a mythic hero.

All of those achievements and reputation that James Fenimore Cooper had, and his ability to combine the qualities of realism and romanticism in tales that are uniquely American, makes the writer interested in choosing him and his work as a research study.

I.2. Statement of the Problem

As the writer has pointed out in the background of the study, many critics said that Hawkeye is a famous literary character that embodies the figure of first American hero. Furthermore, he is a protagonist who is also called as a purely mythic hero by D.H Lawrence, therefore based on that his opinion, the writer is curious to know the reasons why Hawkeye is considered as a mythic hero.

I.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of writing this thesis is to prove that Hawkeye as the main character in *The Last of the Mohicans* is considered as a mythic hero by D.H Lawrence because he can accept everyone according to his gifts and differences, even toward his Indian friends. Moreover, his characteristics has been fulfilled the myth that Cooper creates.

I.4. Importance of the Study

Through this study, the writer explains about American myth, since the readers have already got used to hear about Greek and Roman myths, so that the readers will have a broad knowledge about myth. As a great and established

country, America also has a mythic story which Cooper reveals through its indigenous tribe, the Indians; even a great writer such as James Fenimore Cooper can put it as one of the themes in his works. Also, the writer wants to show that an enemy can be a good friend if each of them can accept everyone according to his gifts and differences.

Furthermore, the writer hopes that the readers particularly the students of the Faculty of Letters will be attracted to study the works of James Fenimore Cooper further. Also, she hopes that the readers could learn more about America including Indian myth through *The Last of the Mohicans* after the discussion as many critics consider this novel the best known of Cooper's series novels *The Leatherstocking Tales*.

I.5. Scope and Limitation

The scope of the study is the life of a figure that is considered as a mythic hero, Hawkeye who lives among the Native American tribe. The writer wants to limit the analysis of the discussion on *The Last of the Mohicans* through the main character, that is Hawkeye. The analysis focuses on Hawkeye's characteristics for he is willing to keep staying with the Indians, and his kind to sacrifice himself. His ability as a good hunter also has a value for Cooper himself to make Hawkeye such a powerful figure.

I.6. Methodology

The writer uses library research as her method of research by using the novel of James Fenimore Cooper, entitled *The Last of the Mohicans* as her primary

source of data. Another data collection she uses is criticisms and articles about the novel itself, the biography of the author, James Fenimore Cooper. Also, the critics' opinions about the attitude of the main character, Hawkeye. She uses literary theories, such as characterization and conflict, the definition of terms as tools to apply into her analysis, also the writer presents Cooper's myths that are related to American Indians history since Cooper is known as a myth maker.

I.7. Organization of the Study

In analyzing the characters, the writer will divide her thesis into four chapters, that is Introduction in chapter 1, Review of Related Literature in chapter 2, Analysis in chapter 3, and the last chapter is Conclusion. The Introduction consists of the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the importance of the study, the scope and limitation, the methodology, and the organization of the study. The second chapter of the thesis reviews the related literature and theories that later will be used to analyze the problem statement. The writer in this chapter is using literary theories, such as the theories of characterization. She finds that the character traits of Hawkeye can be analyzed by using this theory. The writer tries to define the term myth and relate this definition of this term into the characteristic of Hawkeye as a mythic hero. Therefore, by using these methods, the writer is able to analyze the main character, Hawkeye in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Chapter three is the analysis, where the writer analyzes the character named Hawkeye who is considered as a mythic hero in the middle of the Indian's tribe by applying all the theories she has with the characteristic of

Hawkeye through the novel, and the writer answers the problem statement. Finally the last Chapter is the Conclusion. Here, the writer tries to conclude her discussion in the analysis.