

**“Truant” Dispositions and Inclinations:
Alternative Masculinities in Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*.**

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Abstract

Resumen

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The Last of the Mohicans is a novel *about* men and about what it *means* to be a man. The word “man” appears four times in the first chapter; “men” appears seven times; neither “woman” nor “women” appears at all. The setting is a “fatal region” where “the arts of peace were unknown” and its “forests were alive with men” (16)—warriors and statesmen. General Montcalm moves up Lake Champlain “with an army ‘numerous as the leaves on the trees’” (18). General Webb commands the armies of the English king with “a body of more than five thousand men” (19). Cooper’s first-chapter prose is replete with manly language: *commanded*, *husbandman*, *manhood*, *command*, *Scotchman*, *Frenchman*, *commander-in-chief*, *endowments*, *reinforcement*, *detachment*, *regiment*, *arrangements*, *lineaments*, *excitement*, *encampment*, *menials*, *instrument*, *implement* (of war), *commendations*, *judgment*. Despite the masculine semantics, and despite the fact that Hawk-eyeⁱ might want us to believe otherwise, this early nineteenth-century novel performs potent cultural work—it deconstructs the idea that there is only

one, proper, efficacious and “manly” way to be a man. Indeed, few of the primary male characters in the novel are restricted to one, stable, signifying name, and the signification of these names is intimately linked to the conflicting cultural perspectives and competing values of a world in which the masculine is not a stable category.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, it is impossible to identify *the* single hero whose extraordinary skills or super-human accomplishments drive the plot or embody a universal masculine ideal. Among the leading men of the novel, masculinity is further destabilized by the want of heterosexual desire, the absence of overt homophobia, and the lack of interest or participation in the patriarchal networks through which the novel’s English, French, and tribal cultures dominate and control women. Magua’s words are true in more than one way—“The Spirit that made men, coloured them differently” (339).ⁱⁱⁱ

There is, in *Mohicans*, more than one way to be a man.^{iv} There is a generous freedom that includes the nelly and queer,^v yet powerful (in his own way) and efficacious, David Gamut. Then there is the trio of semi-queer superheroes—Hawk-eye, Chingachgook, and Uncas. Hawk-eye, whom David Leverenz calls the “first Last Real Man in America,” prefers his homosocial woodsman existence over what he considers the abnormal heterosexual conventions of the settlements. For this reason, I prefer to call him the First Unmarried Uncle in America. And we have good reason to believe that Uncas, whose body is worshipped by soft-core portions of the text,^{vi} may possess a brand of potency quite other than Hollywood’s James Bond or Captain Kirk. While Chingachgook is obviously a father, he displays no heterosexual interest. Cooper apparently intended *Mohicans* to be a romance^{vii}—the quintessential heterosexual genre—but where is the princess? Who, exactly, is the hero/protagonist? One is left bewildered. The heterosexual love story is nothing more than a sub-plot involving the novel’s cipher, Duncan Heyward, and the virtually silent and entirely passive Alice Munro. Cooper thought so little of

the significance of Duncan’s marriage to Alice that he didn’t even bother to narrate it. Nevertheless, *Mohicans* is not a deficient or defective romance, but one that functions outside the bounds (or before the reification) of heteronormativity;^{viii} it ends, not with the obligatory marriage, but with Hawk-eye pledging his fidelity to Chingachgook.^{ix} In this paper I flesh out and call to appreciation these queer spaces of masculine freedom—freedom to be “a man” outside the rigid, stultifying, and hegemonic constrictions imposed by modern heteronormativity.^x In *Mohicans*, I argue, a culture’s progress—indeed even its survival—is dependent upon the acceptance of diverse masculinities. Homogeneity and compulsory conformity—the establishment of a masculine orthodoxy—lead to stagnation and even annihilation.



The first time the word “man” appears in *Mohicans*, it is tinged with irony: “There was one man [. . .] who, by his countenance and actions, formed a marked exception” (21). David Gamut is the novel’s exception to other men. He is a man only negatively, in a compensatory and parodic relation to other men. The “singing master”^{xi} is ungainly, having the bones and joints of other men, but “without any of their proportions.” A “contrariety in his members [. . .] seemed to exist throughout the whole man.” He is large, with narrow shoulders, delicate hands, and a “false superstructure of blended human orders.” Cooper attributes to Gamut everything unmanly: he is awkward and injudiciously attired; he has a long thin neck; and “longer and thinner legs.” His clothing is described as a costume, which conceals “no curve or angle” and marks him as vain or simple. (What exactly is a costume that doesn’t conceal? Certainly more is implied here than said.) We are told that the cocked hat of a clergyman is this character’s only source of dignity, and that dignity is artificially supplied. While “good natured,” he has a

“vacant countenance” (22). These characteristics subject David to “the worst animadversions of the evil disposed” (21). This is an archaic use of the term “disposed.” According to the *OED*, the denotation is: “Having a physical inclination or tendency (*to* something, or *to do* something); inclined, liable, subject” as in the phrase: “a faulty diet disposes one to sickness.” In other words, David is criticized because his appearance and the shape of his body incline him toward an unspecified evil of some kind. The exact nature of the evil is not immediately specified.

David’s first action is to “stalk” into “the centre of the domestics, freely expressing his censures or commendations on the merits of the horses [,]” while other men “of the common herd stood aloof, in deference to the quarters of [General] Webb” (22). His voice is “remarkable for the softness and sweetness of its tones.” Having addressed himself to everyone and to no one in particular in his bumbling entrance, David finds “a new and more powerful subject of admiration” for his gaze. His eyes fall on the “still, upright, and rigid form” of the “Indian runner”—in a state of “perfect repose.” (What, one wonders, is upright and rigid about a man in a state of perfect repose? The reader is invited to read between the lines.) David’s inexperienced eyes scan the “swarthy lineaments” of his object in “unconcealed amazement.” The eye his eyes meet “glistened like a fiery star amid lowering clouds...in its state of native wildness” (23). For an instant, the Indian’s searching, yet wary glance, “met the wondering look of the other, and then changing its direction, partly in cunning, and partly in disdain, it remained fixed, as if penetrating the distant air.” Perhaps penetration (the kind which follows desire’s penetrating gaze) is the “evil” to which David is in some way “disposed”—hence the Indian’s disdain. The very next words of the text are: “It is impossible to say what unlooked for remark this short and silent communication, between two such singular men, might have elicited”—*impossible to say* figures the *crimen nefandum*—the “love that dare not speak its name.”^{xii}

The idea of penetration is at play in the text and Cooper exploits its various significations in the next paragraphs. The penetration of a horse (with spur) is what drives the beast forward. Penetration can also mean the ability to discern deeply and accurately. David can do neither well. Cooper mocks his riding abilities: “If he possessed the power to arrest any wandering eye, when exhibiting the glories of his altitude on foot, his equestrian graces were still more likely to attract attention” (27). The most “confirmed gait that he could establish, was a Canterbury gallop with the hind legs” (28). Riding with only one spur (the sexual innuendo here is delicious), David appears perfectly ridiculous, as “one side of the mare appeared to journey faster than the other.” His appearance makes a frown gather around the “handsome, open, and manly brow of Heyward.” Simpering upon arrival, David laughs at his own dumb joke, “a witticism...that was perfectly unintelligible to his hearers” (29). David is neither a “manly” man nor one who mixes easily and graciously with others.

David is an instructor in the practice of psalmody, not in the crafts Heyward values: science, mathematics, geometry, and defense and offense. Even though he can “carry a full tenor to the highest letter[.]” the master lacks penetration. Trying to recruit Heyward, Cora, and Alice to sing a psalm, he claims that “four parts are altogether necessary to the perfection of melody” (30). David is wrong—four parts are necessary for the completion of the harmonic structure of a chorale, for the standard soprano, alto, tenor, bass arrangement of a hymn or motet or a psalm from David’s *Bay Psalm Book* (which, incidentally, did not contain melodic notation, but contained only texts). Four parts complete standard *harmony*, not melody. Nor is Alice impressed by his musical performance: “never did I hear a more unworthy conjunction of execution and language . . . an unfitness between sound and sense” (32). In the “shapeless person of the singing master” (33), Cooper draws on the hapless male musician myth^{xiii} to sketch

the caricature of a consummate buffoon and effete homosexual. At least, this is how the novel begins.

In direct contrast to David’s shapelessness, Hawk-eye appears muscular, attenuated. Every nerve and muscle is “strung and indurated, by unremitted exposure and toil” (35). He wears hunting clothes of skins that have been shorn of their fur, pants gartered with the sinews of a deer, and moccasins ornamented “after the gay fashion of the natives.” He carries a knife, pouch, and horn in addition to his rifle. His countenance is without guile and he is “charged with an expression of sturdy honesty” (36). He is cautious and skilful. With his companions Chingachgook and Uncas, he waits for his turn to speak, so as not to betray “womanish curiosity or childish impatience” (40). He pilots the canoe with a master hand, and his form “seems to know neither fatigue nor weakness” (145). There are few geographical locations in the novel that haven’t known the crack of his rifle, “nor is there the space of a square mile atwixt Horican and the river, that ‘kill-deer’ hasn’t dropped a living body on” (154). Mark Twain called Cooper’s Hawk-eye “a man who could hunt flies with a rifle, and command a ducal salary in a Wild West show to-day if we had him back with us.” According to Twain, “Deerslayer-Hawkeye-Long-Rifle-Leatherstocking-Pathfinder-Bumppo” is Cooper’s miracle-worker and prodigy, the superhero he-man crafted to impress and amaze “the ladies” and the reader.^{xiv} At least, that is how the novel begins.



There is another side to both of these “stock” characters.^{xv} David Gamut’s alter-ego starts to come into focus at the abandonment of Fort William Henry when Duncan places him—seemingly the least qualified character—in charge of the protection of Alice and Cora. “It will be your duty,” Duncan charges, “to see that none dare to approach the ladies, with any rude

intention, or to offer insult or taunt at the misfortune of their brave father” (195). If any do so, David is to threaten a report to Montcalm—“A word will suffice” (196), Duncan believes. David, however, has his own linguistic weapon: “Here are words,” he expounds, “which uttered, or rather thundered, with proper emphasis, and in measured time, shall quiet the most unruly temper” (196). The reader has been carefully set up to regard the musician as a hapless fool, but note the confidence both men share in the power of language. Only David’s optimism is validated. When “more than two thousand raging savages” (199) attack the retreating English, and when resistance serves “only to inflame the murderers” (199), the duty-bound Munro heads for Montcalm, leaving his daughters, Alice and Cora, to fend for themselves. “Come to us, father, or we die!” screams the panicked Alice. Abandoned by all the manly men of the novel—we don’t know where Hawk-eye and Duncan are during the attack—Alice and Cora are left to the protection and defense of the “helpless and useless” (200) David. Yet we are told that he “had not yet dreamed of deserting his trust” (200). Cora begs David to leave, to rescue himself. Instead, he rises to the occasion. He becomes erect; he heaves; he swells. The language is sexual and erotic, mirroring a startling and new-found potency.

‘Go,’ said Cora, still gazing at her unconscious sister; ‘save thyself. To me thou canst not be of further use.’

David comprehended the unyielding character of her resolution, by the simple, but expressive, gesture that accompanied her words. He gazed, for a moment, at the dusky forms that were acting their hellish rites on every side of him, and his tall person grew more erect, while his chest heaved, and every feature swelled, and seemed to speak with the power of the feelings by which he was governed.

‘If the Jewish boy might tame the evil spirit of Saul, by the sound of his harp, and the words of sacred song, it may not be amiss,’ he said, ‘to try the potency of music here.’ (200)

The Oxford text should contain a footnote here to the obvious intertextual referent: 1 Samuel 16:23—“And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.” The linking of David Gamut to the Hebrew Scripture’s David is significant for the latter’s relationship to Jonathan, son of Saul. The evil spirit that David casts out with his harp may just be Saul’s jealousy of Jonathan and David’s homo-erotically charged relationship. Also significant is the biblical David’s triumph over Goliath, which is archetypically figured here. The scene ends with the abduction of Cora and Alice by Magua, but Mohicans is clear: it is David who accomplishes the astonishing feat of saving their lives in the melee.

Then raising his voice to its highest tones, he poured out a strain so powerful as to be heard, even amid the din of that bloody field. More than one savage rushed towards them, thinking to rifle the unprotected sisters of their attire, and bear away their scalps; but when they found this strange and unmoved figure, riveted to his post, they paused to listen. Astonishment soon changed to admiration, and they passed on to other, and less courageous victims, openly expressing their satisfaction at the firmness with which the white warrior sung his death song. (200-1)

Cooper doesn’t explain how Hawk-eye and Duncan survive the bloodbath at Fort William Henry. Nor does he explain why they are AWOL—“absent without leave”—why they and Munro wait from August to November to begin their search for Munro’s daughters. These

gaping narrative holes are replaced by a jump to the search and rescue mission that queerly places David as the guarantor and linchpin at every juncture. In chapter seventeen, David receives his commission from Duncan to protect Cora and Alice and subsequently saves them from the slaughter. When the rescue party, in the next chapter, returns to the scene of the carnage, it is David's "tooting we'pon" (212) that first points the way to the captives' trail—a clue David must have deliberately left behind. Once across the treacherous Horicon, and afraid that they've lost the trail, Uncas discovers David's footprint under the water of a "turbid little rill which ran from the spring" (245)—a very queer moment in literature.^{xvi} Unable to discover any trail indicating the passage of the "tender ones," the pursuers are entirely dependent upon the footprint/trail left by David. Hawk-eye decides that David's voice is not his only gift: "The singer" becomes "a man whose gifts lay chiefly in his throat and feet" (246). When they later find the singer's trail indicates exhaustion, Hawk-eye revokes the compliment: "Ay, ay, a man who uses his throat altogether, can hardly give his legs a proper training!" (247). Despite Hawk-eye's equivocations, the text is clear: he and his party of pursuers are kept on the right path by deliberate clues and inadvertent cues left behind by David. In the world of *Mohicans*, alternative masculinities—David's "queerness" and Hawk-eye's "manliness"—not only work together, they are necessary for cultural progress.

David's status grows as the novel progresses—at least in the eyes of the careful reader. David is the first person the party meets when approaching the Huron village. Hawk-eye, however, cannot know what the reader knows—that David saved Alice and Cora. He does know that it was David's deliberately discarded pitch pipe that pointed the way to the trail, and that it was David's footprint that lead them to David, faithful and courageous companion of the

daughters. Nevertheless, Hawk-eye feels it necessary to deliver a lecture that invites the injudicious reader to adopt his patronizing attitude:

The Lord never intended that the man should place all his endeavours in his throat, to the neglect of other and better gifts! But he has fallen into the hands of some silly woman, when he should have been gathering his education under a blue sky, and among the beauties of the forest. Here, friend; I did intend to kindle a fire with this tooting whistle of thine, but as you value the thing, take it, and blow your best on it! (254)

What David blows, however, is the cover, security, and crafty planning of the Hurons. The rescue party learns from David the exact locations of Alice and Cora. David becomes Duncan’s guide into the Huron tribe, forcing the equivocating Hawk-eye to reevaluate his prejudicial attitude: “Ay, but David can use his throat, as no man, in his senses, would pervart the gift” (258). The rescue of Uncas is facilitated by David, who “found access to Uncas, under privilege of his imaginary infirmity, aided by the favour he had acquired with one of the guards” (304). Hawk-eye, dressed as a bear, is “compelled to trust the conversation entirely to David” (305) and his remedial knowledge of the Huron language. David “more than” fulfills “the strongest hopes of his teacher” (305) and gains access for them. Nevertheless, once inside the captive’s chamber, the stubborn Hawk-eye refuses to acknowledge David’s resourcefulness: “What shall we do with the Mingoes at the door! They count six, and this singer is as good as nothing” (307). Before leaving David behind in Uncas’ place, Hawk-eye asks him: “Are you much given to cowardice?” (309). The answer reveals the truth the stiff-necked and foolish woodsman (it was Hawk-eye who claimed that David’s singing “won’t do any good with the Iroquois” (77)) willfully refuses to acknowledge—that David is brave and has his own special

kind of competence: “I will abide in the place of the Delaware [,]” he responds, “bravely and generously has he battled in my behalf, and this, and more, will I dare in his service” (309). David’s offering of himself to save his friend forms a striking contrast to the scene in which Hawk-eye refuses (at least initially, and then acquiesces only begrudgingly), in front of Tamenund and the Delawares, to offer himself to Magua in exchange for Cora: “It would be an unequal exchange,” he protests, “to give a warrior, in the prime of his age and usefulness, for the best woman on the frontiers” (354). Here is the truth about Hawk-eye: any real interest in the protection of women has to be publicly shamed into him. David never shoots a gun; he can’t slay a buck for dinner, scout or navigate the ways of the woods, or “cut the throat of a Huron” (212), yet his devotion to the women surpasses, and his courage equals, that of the lionized Hawk-eye. Furthermore, without David, the rescue mission would have repeatedly and disastrously failed. Hawk-eye is dead wrong about David’s manliness—the singer possesses both extraordinary courage and a potency/proficiency of his own.

Even though Hawk-eye believes that there is only one proper way to be a man and his opinion doesn’t change—he is in that sense a static character—he is not two-dimensional or stereotypical. Nor is he a stock masculine hero. There is, even, something queer about Hawk-eye.^{xvii} The woodsman’s masculinity is persistently contrasted with others, frequently in his own self-validating voice. Notable is the censure he reserves for those who read and write books and for those who associate themselves with women, or adopt their views, customs, or morals. Much of that disapproval, rooted, of course, in his own insecurity, is directed at David and his “high vocation”: “‘Tis a strange calling!’ muttered Hawk-eye, with an inward laugh, ‘to go through life, like a cat-bird, mocking all the ups and downs that may happen to come out of other men’s throats.’” (67). Mocking the ups and downs that come out of other men’s throats (mocking their

singing) is Hawk-eye’s vocation, not David’s. He routinely lectures David, assuming the condescending and paternal posture of masculine rectitude:

[. . .] part with the little tooting instrument in your jacket to the first fool you meet with, and buy some useful we’pon with the money, if it be only the barrel of a horseman’s pistol...a carrion crow is a better bird than a mocking thrasher. The one will, at least, remove foul sights from before the face of man, while the other is only good to brew disturbances in the woods, by cheating the ears of all that hear them.” (132)

For Hawk-eye, there is only one way to be a “real” man, and his recipe for that type of man is foisted *ad nauseum* upon the reader throughout the novel. Read through a lens attentive to the novel’s competing/contesting claims about masculinity, David—the weak, feminine, useless, and impotent—is Hawk-eye’s foil. Lurking beneath that surface reading, however, is the novel’s real cultural punch, and that is deconstructing Hawk-eye’s mono-masculine, sexist, and xenophobic orthodoxy.

The Huron tribe exemplifies the limits of the danger. To them, the only way to be a man is to be a brave warrior.^{xviii} The English noun “brave” signifies a warrior—specifically an Indian warrior. “Brave warrior” is therefore tautological—not just linguistically, but in the patterns of thought that govern the way the Hurons of the novel believe and live. “Sinewy limbs and firm tread” indicate whether one is “still equal to the duties of manhood” (266). To be a man is to be a warrior is to be a brave warrior—(one wonders if the conflation of the nouns “brave” and “warrior” in Indian culture is responsible for their conflation in American English). Yet even the Hurons had exceptions to this controlling linguistic calculus. Their counterpart to David Gamut is Reed-that-bends. Although the Great Spirit made him “pleasant to the eyes” and with “finely

moulded form” (276), Reed-that-bends is not, at least beneath the appearance, the right kind of man. Although his tongue is loud in the village, it is still in battle. Although he strikes the tomahawk deeper into the war-post than any other of his tribe, his skills don’t translate to the battlefield. Three times he disappoints his tribe. So Reed-that-bends rises to bare his bosom, looking “steadily on the keen, glittering knife” (276) that is held by his judge. Cooper sacrifices Reed-that-bends (his presence in the novel is otherwise irrelevant) to make this point: when a culture’s men are all *reduced* to being “brave warriors,” the result is annihilation. As the knife passes into his heart, Reed-that-bends smiles, “as if in joy, at having found death less dreadful than he had anticipated” (276). Reed-that-bends is happy to exit a savage nation which believes there is only one way to be a man. He loses his life, but the Huron’s narrow vision facilitates their extermination.^{xix}

While masculinity is a conflicted and contested space in *Mohicans*, it is strangely unaccompanied by homophobia. *Mohicans* is a testament to a time in America before the imposition of rigid codes of heteronormativity; it is also witness to a time before the homosexual was established in our cultural ideology as the straight man’s quintessential “other.”^{xx} The rugged Hawk-eye is surprisingly (to today’s reader, anyway) tolerant of David. He occasionally recognizes his unique gifts (even if he believes them inferior) and even asks him to perform: “I suppose it is your gift, and mustn’t be denied any more than if ‘twas shooting, or some other better inclination. Let us hear what you can do in that way” (67-8). When David sings as requested, Chingachgook and Uncas listen with an attention that “seemed to turn them into stone” (68), while “the scout,” who began with an expression of cold indifference, “gradually suffered his rigid features to relax, until, as verse succeeded verse, he felt his iron nature subdued” his “roving eyes began to moisten, and before the hymn was ended, scalding tears

rolled out of [a] fountain that had long seemed dry, and followed each other down those cheeks that had oftener felt the storms of heaven, than any testimonials of weakness” (68-9). David has the power to reduce the mighty Hawk-eye to a puddle of tears.

Hawk-eye never tires of lecturing David, telling him repeatedly to part with his “tooting we’pon” and adopt the weapons and customs of the woodsmen. The novel refutes Hawk-eye’s proselytizing. When David does part with his pitch pipe, his action becomes the catalyst for rescue, not a validation of Hawk-eye’s bias. In a comic and ironic twist, Hawk-eye is forced to practice David’s art before the master of song adopts his: “The instant Hawk-eye found himself under the observation of the Hurons, he drew up his tall form in the rigid manner of David, threw out his arm in the act of keeping time, and commenced, what he intended for an imitation of his psalmody” (310). In the final battle between the Huron and the Delaware tribes, David tosses in his pipe for a slingshot. David and Hawk-eye have each practiced the other’s art, the other’s way of being a man in the world. The novel validates both.

While Hawk-eye’s disapprobation of David may seem perfectly natural to today’s reader, awash in the normativity that governs our culture, his objection to the effect settlements have on those who live in them may not. In Hawk-eye’s view, settlements pervert a man’s relationship to God:

I know not but man may so deform his works in the settlement, as to leave that which is so clear in the wilderness, a matter of doubt among traders and priests. If any such there be, and he will follow me from sun to sun, through the windings of the forest, he shall see enough to teach him that he is a fool, and that the greatest of his folly lies in striving to rise to the level of one he can never equal, be it in goodness, or be it in power. (134)

Settlements and the agrarian habits they foster are threatening and distasteful: “God knows what the country would be, if the settlements should ever spread far from the two rivers. Both hunting and war would lose their beauty!” (239). Settlements pervert the nature of man and his relationship to the natural world: “I dare to say there are even stranger sights to be seen in the settlements...nature is sadly abused by man, when he once gets the mastery” (139). Hawk-eye, the masculine superhero of *Mohicans*, cries without shame at the sound of music, discusses theology, and makes truth-claims about the nature of mankind which are hostile to book-learning, theological discourse, music, agriculture, and community-based life. But his idiosyncrasies don’t end there—he is also hostile to women and the norms of heterosexuality as they are practiced in the settlements, and by extension, the tribes.

Here is an uncomfortable truth for the critical tradition that has lionized Hawk-eye: Cooper’s quill queered his “first Last Real Man.” After David, Duncan, and Hawk-eye rescue Alice from the Hurons, Hawk-eye turns back to the Indian village to rescue the left-behind “pride of the Delawares” (300), pledging not simply to lay down his own life if need be, but to die alongside Uncas if he cannot rescue him: “if the young Sagamore is to be led to the stake, the Indians shall see *also* how a man without a cross can die!” (300, *italics mine*). Hawk-eye’s determination exceeds David’s earlier willingness to sacrifice himself for Uncas, for Hawk-eye’s pledge moves through self-sacrifice and revenge to a promised immolation and self-destruction—a *tour de force* performance, on behalf of the beloved, staged before the Indians. Hawk-eye doesn’t want to live without Uncas. Even more striking, however, is how Hawk-eye’s intentions form yet another parallel to the later scene in which he rejects as absurd the proposition of trading his life for Cora’s. Hawk-eye is willing to toss his life away, *a priori*, in a failed attempt to rescue Uncas, but he is unwilling to sacrifice his life in a reciprocal exchange

for Cora’s. Fortunately for him, neither of the heterosexuals (Duncan nor Alice) is “the least offended with the decided *preference* that the sturdy woodsman gave to *one who might, in some degree, be called the child of his adoption*” (300, *italics mine*). (Could the narrator possibly be more ambiguous about this relationship?) Duncan and Alice urge him not to return to the village, that his proposed endeavor is too dangerous and doesn’t promise success, yet their “eloquence and ingenuity were expended in vain” (300). In Hawk-eye’s impatient and terse response, he positions himself as Uncas’ father, a position he could at best share with Chingachgook, making these two one of the first inter-racial, same-sex couples in American literature.^{xxi} Hawk-eye doesn’t stop there, however. His explanation of his intentions explicitly rejects the norms of heterosexuality practiced in the settlements:

‘I have heard,’ he said, ‘that there is a feeling in youth, which binds man to woman, closer than the father is tied to the son. It may be so. I have seldom been where women of my colour dwell; but such may be the gifts of nature in the settlements!’ (301)

Not only does he reject this type of heterosexuality (his claims to prefer his son’s companionship to that of women is troubled by the fact that Uncas is not really his son), he proffers for an explanation to his un-married, yet not-really-single homosocial lifestyle that he’s simply not been around—and therefore not yet met—the right woman of his color. Perhaps this First Unmarried Uncle protests too much. The “father” of Uncas and the boyfriend of Chingachgook asks us to believe that Indian women just aren’t his cup of tea.^{xxii}

But, the reader might object, Hawk-eye is instrumental in the guiding and rescuing of Cora and Alice, and isn’t this the central concern of the narrative? Hawk-eye’s motivations remain a mystery to this reader. What is clear, however, is that his actions never flow from

heterosexual interest; they are always accompanied by rationalization. When the trio of manliness adopt the wayward Heyward, Cora and Alice, they agree to become their guides only to “circumvent the cunning of the devils who fill these woods” (54). When the group is trapped at Glenn’s Falls, Cora suggests that the three woodsmen escape in the river: “Then try the river. Why linger, to add to the number of the victims of our merciless enemies?” Hawk-eye responds that he wants to die in peace: “What answer,” he says, “could we give to Munro, when he asked us, where and how we left his children?” This hero of the woods, over whom critics seem so eager to raise their own heterosexual colors, shows no direct concern for the wellbeing or feelings of the women—his only concern regards his relationship to Munro. So is this a moment in the trafficking of women that is patriarchy? I don’t believe so. Heidi Harmann defines patriarchy in the following instructive manner: “relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women” (14). *Women*, however, are precisely what are missing from this scene, at least in Hawk-eye’s mind—he explicitly refers to Alice and Cora as *children*. Alice and Cora don’t register on Hawk-eye’s sexual radar—in pointed contrast to Duncan’s—they are completely invisible.

The daughters of Munro may or may not be savvy enough to discern just how invisible their sex is to the First Unmarried Uncle. The Delaware women, however, encountering the beautiful and manly Uncas, aren’t so naive. In wild bursts of funereal chants, with united voices, the “Delaware girls” (386) pronounce Uncas noble, manly, and loveable—yet not a man whose inclinations would point any part of him in their direction:

Then, in a wild burst of their chant, they sung, with united voices, the
temper of the Mohican’s mind. They pronounce him noble, manly, and

generous; all that became a warrior, and all that a maid might love. Clothing their ideas in the most remote and subtle images, they betrayed, that, in the short period of their intercourse, they had discovered, with the intuitive perception of their sex, the truant disposition of his inclinations.

The Delaware girls had found no favour in his eyes! (386)

The narrator immediately becomes ambiguous, remote and subtle again, as if camouflaging his too-obvious trail:

He was of a race that had once been lords on the shores of the salt lake, and his wishes had led him back to a people who dwelt about the graves of his fathers. Why should not such a predilection be encouraged! That she [Uncas?—this passage only makes sense if the pronoun points to Uncas.] was of a blood purer and richer than the rest of her nation, any eye might have seen. That she was equal to the dangers and daring of a life in the woods, her conduct had proved, and, now, they added, the ‘wise one of the earth’ had transplanted her to a place where she would find congenial spirits, and might be for ever happy. (386-7)

To live happily ever after is supposed to be the end of a romance or love story. Yet here we are in the midst of a funeral, and Fenimore Cooper leans over our shoulders to tell us the fallen hero was “not into women.” Then he turns his focus to Chingachgook, understandably beside himself at his son’s death. Fearing a future solitary existence, Chingachgook mourns: “I am a ‘blazed pine, in a clearing of the pale-faces.’ My race has gone from the shores of the salt lake, and the hills of the Delawares. But who can say that the serpent of his tribe has forgotten his wisdom! I

am alone—” (393). Hawk-eye comes to his emotional rescue: “No, no,” he cries, gazing at his friend with a “yearning look”^{xxiii} (393), with

something like his own self-command, but whose philosophy could endure no longer; ‘no, Sagamore, not alone. The gifts of our colours may be different, but God has so placed us as to journey in the same path. I have no kin, and I may also say, like you, no people. He was your son, and a red-skin by nature; and it may be, that your blood was nearer;—but if ever I forget the lad, who has so often fou’t at my side in war, and slept at my side in peace, may He who made us all, whatever may be our colour or our gifts, forget me. The boy has left us for a time, but, Sagamore, you are not alone! (393-4)

While “scalding tears fell to their feet” watering the grave of Uncas, the “two most renowned warriors of that region” (394)—these two same-sex parents—pledge their eternal fidelity. Tamenund lifts his voice to disperse the multitude observing. The novel closes.

This is romance: adventure and chivalry, strict codes of behavior and demeanor, fights displaying super-human ability. Missing in the Cooper adaptation, however, is the fickle but beautiful princess whom the hero wins through his virtuosic displays of skill and charm. I suggest that *Mohicans* contains no princess and no single hero because Hawk-eye and Chingachgook had found each other before the novel began. Hawk-eye is the First Unmarried Uncle, not the first Last Real Man.

Notes

ⁱ I use the name Hawk-eye, rather than Nathaniel, Long Rifle, or Natty Bumppo, because that is the name this text preferences and Hawk-eye himself considers a compliment. Hawk-eye rejects the name the Iroquois call him (la Longue Carabine); the name Natty Bumppo does not appear in Mohicans; and Nathaniel is the name Hawk-eye says he received from his kin: “I am the man...that got the name of Nathaniel from my kin; the compliment of Hawk-eye from the Delawares” (334).

ⁱⁱ For instance, Hawk-eye is offended by the Iroquois name “la Longue Carabine.” That name—“the long rifle”—implies that his skill is external, related to his possession of an unusual weapon which supplies his potency, while “Hawk-eye” implies the keen vision and hunter’s instinct of a warrior or predator, characteristics integral and complimentary to his masculine identity.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Kelly points out how Cooper quotes from and invokes images and scenes from the masterworks of English literature, for instance, how Magua’s call for Indian rebellion is patterned on Milton’s Satan. A question for further reflection is how Cooper drafts alternative masculinities in a fashion similar to Milton’s crafting of alternative sexualities in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained.

^{iv} Jane Tompkins notes how critics have accused Cooper of sensationalism and cliché, of creating stock characters, of reducing complexity and ambiguity to simple and satisfying formulae. Viewed through a lens attentive to competing claims about masculinity, however, quite the opposite seems true. Ambiguity, contradiction, and complexity are richly on display in Mohicans, the novel. Where it lacks is in Michael Mann’s 1992 film adaptation. If Tompkins is right—that Cooper’s novels were attempts to define and prescribe cultural solutions for specific historical circumstances—then Cooper’s novel deserves reappraisal. Its relevance for today’s audience is enhanced by the deficiency of the film.

^v The word “queer,” according to David Halperin, has “the ability...to define (homo)sexual identity oppositionally and relationally but not necessarily substantively, not as a positivity but as a positionality, not as a thing but as a resistance to the norm” (Saint Foucault 66). Queer does not necessarily imply homosexual.

^{vi} Alice, for instance, gazes on Uncas, at his “free air and proud carriage, as she would have looked upon some precious relic of the Grecian chisel, to which life had been imparted, by the intervention of a miracle” (62). Duncan follows suit. Though “accustomed to see the perfection of form which abounds among the uncorrupted natives,” he “openly expressed his admiration at such an unblemished specimen of the noblest proportions of man” (62).

^{vii} See Kelly p. 45-6.

^{viii} Heteronormativity, according to Michael Warner, is an ideology, fully naturalized in modern American culture, which considers heterosexuality the elemental form of human association, the very model of inter-gender relations, the indivisible basis of all community, and the means of reproduction without which society couldn’t even exist.

^{ix} Leverenz misreads the significance of the novel’s final scene: “Childless, facing death, and bonded with natural manly feeling, the two embody a double elegy for a vanishing patriarchal simplicity” (755). Patriarchy, by definition, involves the subjugation of women; even in cultures where it is “simple” or naturalized, there is nothing “natural” about it. Nor has patriarchy vanished. Neither Hawk-eye nor Chingachgook has any relationship with women. Their lifestyle embodies the *rejection* of women, not their subordination. Perhaps Leverenz inserts these troublesome words to assure his reader that this “patriarchal” relationship—really a homosocial relationship—is in no danger of becoming the *un-natural*—a homosexual relationship. Thankfully, Cooper did not share this phobic, twentieth-century angst. For a thorough analysis of the rupture between the homosocial and the homosexual that permeates today’s cultural organization, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s Between Men.

^x The offensive presumptions of heteronormativity and what Adrienne Rich adroitly labeled “Compulsive Heterosexuality” are richly on display in Michael Mann’s 1992 film adaptation of the novel. There is no queer David Gamut in Mann’s Mohicans. The second scene places Hawk-eye, Chingachgook, and Uncas in a colonial cabin, with children on their laps, and the happy heterosexual settlers gazing lovingly into each other’s eyes. Hawk-eye/Nathaniel calls Chingachgook his father and Uncas his brother, thereby erasing the ambiguity that exists in the novel and soundly placing the characters within the heteronormative. A gratuitous and plot-dominating heterosexual love story is crafted for Hawk-eye and Cora, complete with long gazes of desire and passionate kisses and love making. Uncas tenderly embraces Alice at Glenn’s Falls. The “ugly” heterosexual desire—Magua’s for Cora—is simply erased from the plot, and the final scene features the tender embrace and implicit “happy ever after” for Nathaniel and Cora. In the film’s version of the final scene, Chingachgook mourns the passing of his people and

says that the future belongs to his son and his chosen wife and their children. In short, every shred of ambiguity is erased to enshrine an unhistorical heteronormativity in the early American wilderness.

^{xi} Gamut’s vocation is not treated seriously or accurately described, either in *Mohicans* itself, or in the critical works surveyed for this paper. For instance, Leverenz refers to David as a “transplant from high civilization” (755). David is not a transplant from “high civilization.” His theology is manifestly Calvinist—“He that is to be saved will be saved, and he that is predestined to be damned will be damned! This is the doctrine of truth, and most consoling and refreshing it is to the true believer” (133)—and he carries a copy of *The Bay Psalm Book*, a book of significance in the history of music (the first music published in the colonies) and a book which helps identify and contextualize David’s vocation. The Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock in December of 1620 were Puritans who brought with them their tradition of psalm singing. According to Charles Hamm, “it is reasonable to assume that psalms were sung as soon as possible after their safe landing, and throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century, in their churches and homes” (24). Later Puritans who settled the Massachusetts Bay Colony were likewise devoted to psalm singing. *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre*, the official name of the book later popularly called *The Bay Psalm Book*, appeared in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1640 and went through seventy editions, the last in 1773, becoming the first and most widely used American psalter. It was common practice for a leader, or “preceptor” to “line out” (sing) the psalms, line by line, with the congregation (or a group at home) singing each phrase after him. Lining out was “an expediency, adopted because the majority of the colonists were musically illiterate” (33). This is the context in which David’s claim to be an “unworthy instructor in the art of psalmody” (67) and to “teach singing to the youths of the Connecticut levy” (67) is properly understood. He does not appear to be musically sophisticated at all.

^{xii} According to Caleb Crain, sodomy was the sin known in Cooper’s time for its lack of a name. “Unspeakable,” for instance, is a codeword in Charles Brockden Brown’s fragmentary *Stephen Calvert* for the act Clelia Neville finds her husband doing with other men. Preterition—passing over or omitting—was “the conventional way to represent sodomy” (131).

^{xiii} According to Leverenz, the “hapless male musician has been a contrasting foil in various Real Man myths since the time of Hercules, who as a boy knocked his music teacher dead with his lyre” (755-6).

^{xiv} According to Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, a commonplace in historical writing “maintains that a nation of frontiersmen and independent producers naturally enshrined free-spirited individualists such as Natty Bumppo, Daniel Boone, and Davy Crockett” (2).

^{xv} By focusing on the characters of David Gamut and Hawk-eye, it is my intention to trouble the notion that Cooper’s characters can be read as simple stereotypes, or in an allegorical mode in which the characters represent archetypes or concepts such as justice, mercy, law, freedom, or an ideal masculinity. A larger and more detailed study of the varieties of masculinity exhibited in *Mohicans* would be a welcome development. I do agree with Tompkins that the novel is about conflicts which are themselves the result of “fundamental and irreconcilable dissimilarities of outlook which are culturally based[,]” and that “these dissimilarities and what they may or may not mean for the future of American society...form the true subject of *The Last of the Mohicans*” (104). As Tompkins notes, an “obsessive preoccupation with systems of classification—the insignia by which race is distinguished from race, nation from nation, tribe from tribe, human from animal, male from female—dominates every aspect of the novel” (105). What intrigues me is how the category of the masculine, amidst all this classification, remains, nevertheless, unstable.

^{xvi} Mark Twain says the following: “If Cooper had any real knowledge of Nature’s ways of doing things, he had a most delicate art in concealing the fact. For instance: one of his acute Indian experts, Chingachgook (pronounced Chicago, I think), has lost the trail of a person he is tracking through the forest. Apparently that trail is hopelessly lost. Neither you nor I could ever have guessed the way to find it. It was very different with Chicago. Chicago was not stumped for long. He turned a running stream out of its course, and there, in the slush in its old bed, were that person’s moccasin tracks. The current did not wash them away, as it would have done in all other like cases -- no, even the eternal laws of Nature have to vacate when Cooper wants to put up a delicate job of woodcraft on the reader.”

^{xvii} According to Tompkins, between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, Americans wrote seventy-three novels dealing with Indian-white relations. “With few exceptions,” Tompkins notes, “the white hero and heroine marry at the end, the bad Indian or Indians are killed, and the good Indian either dies, or dies out because he has no heirs” (110). “Cooper’s Leatherstocking novels[,]” she claims, “are no exception to this pattern” (111). Tompkins is quite wrong. In the final scene of *Mohicans*, Hawk-eye (if he is indeed the hero) pledges fidelity to Chingachgook, not to a woman. If it was, in fact, Cooper’s intention that *Mohicans* be a romance, one marvels at its idiosyncrasies.

^{xviii} Jonathan Katz’s documentary evidence in Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A., particularly the chapter “Native Americans/Gay Americans 1528-1976,” provides ample material for anyone wishing to trouble the historicity of Cooper’s depiction of Native American intolerance of alternative masculinity or sexuality.

^{xix} In the media this month: the execution hanging of two teenage boys in Iran convicted of the great crime of homosexuality. Iran, like the Hurons of Mohicans, is a savage nation which does not tolerate divergent masculinities. 7/22/05 <<http://www.beirut.indymedia.org/ar/2005/07/2999.shtml>> Unlike Iran, American intolerance is not expressed in physical butchering. Rather, ours is reflected in movies like Michael Mann’s, where queer people like David Gamut are simply “erased” to make audiences more comfortable and self-assured, with a heterosexuality that is purified and rarified (Magua’s “ugly” desire is erased as well). The dynamic is alive and well today: movie director Oliver Stone has cut the gay references from his Alexander movie for the DVD version of the 2004 release. Stone claims it was unpopular with American audiences because of the subtle homosexual content: “They didn’t even read the reviews in the South because the media was using the words: ‘Alex is Gay’. As a result you can bet that they thought, ‘We’re not going to see a film about a military leader that has got something wrong with him.’” Perhaps Stone has been reading David Leverenz (who makes the absurd suggestion that Kim Basinger replace Chingachgook)—more of the pleasing angles of Rosario Dawson’s character Roxanne will be included in the Alexander DVD. 7/25/05

<<http://www.contactmusic.com/new/xmlfeed.nsf/mndwebpages/stone%20cuts%20gay%20references%20for%20alexander%20dvd>>

^{xx} In Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick traces the collapse of a continuum of male homosocial/homosexual relations into what became, by the first decade of the twentieth century, a “gaping and unbridgeable homophobic rift” (201) in which “homosocial desire as a whole really gives way to...male homosexuality and homophobia as we know them” (202).

^{xxi} I want to avoid what David Halperin labels the “insidious temptation to sexualize the erotics of male friendship” (One Hundred Years 75). In framing the friendship of Hawk-eye, Chingachgook, and Uncas, Cooper draws on a long literary tradition of celebrating male friendship, especially that between warriors. Scrutinizing the relationships between David and Jonathan, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, and Achilles and Patroclus, Halperin warns of the danger of trying to map our own emotional patterns and sexual categories onto the characters of older texts. I point to the homosocial and homoerotic passages of Mohicans not to establish homosexual identities, but to trouble the ease with which heteronormativity has been imposed upon them.

^{xxii} Hawk-eye is not the only person in denial. Leverenz is determined to frame the frontier as a natural factory for producing a new and unique American manhood—a pointedly *heterosexual* manhood—and he’s determined that Hawk-eye be the first “real man,” the foundation of the myth he extrapolates. Misreading Mohicans by ignoring Hawk-eye’s sworn aversion to women, he quips: “Not one of Cooper’s contemporary readers would have dreamed of calling for a Kim Basinger to replace Chingachgook, though it is fun to imagine what Natty would do” (770). The claim is absurd. Mohicans gives no reason to assume that Hawk-eye is heterosexual and plenty of reason to question the heterosexism inherent in such an assumption. Furthermore, we *already* know what Hawk-eye *actually chooses* to do: he turns his back on all women for a life with Chingachgook.

^{xxiii} I noted earlier how preterition was the conventional way to represent sodomy and how Brockden Brown’s Clelia used the word “unspeakable” as code for the act. She uses the same language to describe her affection for her aunt, Mrs. Keith: “I looked after my beloved friend with unspeakable longings” (as quoted in Crain p. 131). According to Crain, Brown “uses the same phrasing to indicate both the horror of sodomy and the intensity of affection in a same-sex friendship” (131). The parallel here is obvious.

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