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The Anticolonial Fantasy in *The Pioneers*

For the majority of James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Pioneers*, the reader is situated between two groups of characters divided by moral conflict. The dominant, colonial forces, spearheaded by Judge Temple, are opposed by an anticolonial counter-current created by society's outsiders—John Mohegan, Oliver Edwards, and Natty Bumppo. Yet the conflict itself unravels during Chapter XL's revelatory scene, in which the true social and moral statuses of the outsider figures are revealed. Critics have heretofore ignored or underestimated the impact of these revelations and the following chapters on the novel's anticolonial sentiments; I argue that the final chapters of the novel should cause us to question the allegiance of the outsider characters to anticolonialism. Even Natty, who critics have generally seen as morally uncompromised by the end of the novel, should suffer our deflated esteem through his perpetuation of dominance, subsequent disempowerment, and retreat from society. Of course, the text's undermining of the moral transparency of Mohegan, Edwards, and Natty calls into question its overall anticolonial message.

Chapter XL to the end of the novel tells us that the anticolonial forces are little more than fantasy, without the heart or the power to truly challenge Temple's colonialism. Why should Cooper create this fantasy only to destroy it? Before successfully eliminating or disempowering the anticolonial figures, as well as any lingering threat to Temple's society from the former owners of the land, the text creates room to be nostalgic about the past and to admit of some of the challenges which colonialism presents; yet even those allowances are voided in the end by resolving or ignoring the legitimate challenges to colonialism, thereby reassuring the colonial future of Templeton. In this paper, I will explain who the primary colonial figures are, as well as

the manifestations of colonialism in the text; detail how the three outsider characters defy the colonialist efforts; outline the revelatory scene and note how it alters our perspectives of the outsider characters; spend particular attention on Natty's transformation, my argument's most marked departure from current criticism; and describe the impact of the anticolonial disillusionment on the text at large.

1. Colonialism Established

Judge Marmaduke Temple, a familial legacy of the colonies dating back to 120 years prior to the story, is early on established as a colonizing figure. The wealthy landowner of the town which bears his name, Temple is systematically driven by the desire to turn the wilderness into civilization: "To his eye, where others saw nothing but a wilderness, towns, manufactories, bridges, canals, mines, and all the other resources of an old country were constantly presenting themselves..." (Cooper 324). For his daughter and the people of his society, he is a benevolent paternalist, a characteristic figure of colonialist texts. Christopher B. Gray defines paternalism as "to act for the good of another person without that person's consent, as parents do for children. It is controversial because its end is benevolent, and its means coercive." As Judge and proprietor, Temple has nearly unlimited power with the land and its people, but his actions are often framed as being for the good of society. Temple provides capital for the town buildings out of his own pockets, and the people respond by appointing his family their own place in the church—drawing a physical line between the few members of the upper class and the common people. The narrator writes as Elizabeth looks over her father's land: "But such had been the will of her father, and such had also met the wishes of his followers" (54).

Temple's cousin Richard Jones is another colonialist character, and perhaps the most outspoken supporter of Temple's colonialism. Richard expresses what we may see as a driving

principle of his character when he says to Elizabeth, “Everything depends on system, girl. I shall sit down this afternoon and systematize the county” (181). Our understanding of Richard’s character suggests that his ideas about systemizing go beyond creating counties, and beyond his job as deputy; it speaks to an ideological perspective in which everyone knows and lives by his/her place in society, and which strongly aligns itself with Temple’s goal of carving civilization out of the wilderness.

In contrast to Temple’s democratic liberality, Richard seems to have “old world” views, especially when he says, “if it were in my power, I’d make 'Duke a king. He is a noble hearted fellow, and would make an excellent king; that is, if he had a good prime minister” (clearly envisioning himself as the prime minister) (182). Their differences are dramatized with the issue of the denomination of the church, in which Richard sneakily creates the building to resemble a Protestant Episcopal Church when he cannot convince the people honestly, whereas Temple obstinately refuses to pick the denomination, although in doing so “the question would have been immediately put at rest” (Ch. X). Richard is constantly ridiculed in the text for his overblown sense of importance, and he comes to represent the “bad side” of colonialism.

The text’s critique of Richard does not damage the cause of colonialism, however, but serves to make Temple (the text’s personification of colonialism) look better by comparison. Temple seems to share our skeptical view of Richard, and seeks to “sift the wheat from the chaff” with everything that his cousin says (323). In fact, the text employs several techniques to portray Temple in a positive light, even as it lightly critiques him through the rhetoric of the “outsider” characters. In Chapter I, although Temple shoots poorly and with the wrong gun, we can admire that he “smiles good-humoredly” in the face of criticisms from Natty and Edwards, and is determined to right his wrong by helping to care for Edwards’ shot wound. Dramatically,

he even offers Edwards a place in his home for life (16). The text frequently reminds us of “the benevolent intentions of Judge Temple” (333).

Temple’s daughter Elizabeth is interesting to talk about in terms of colonialism, as she seems to hold sympathies with both her father and the outsider characters. She and Natty form a bond over his twice saving her life, and he seems to think better of her than of her father.

Elizabeth is also present when Natty escapes from jail, and even goes against the will of her father to bring him gun powder. In spite of this, Elizabeth seems to align with Natty in feeling but not in principle, and ultimately believes in her father’s colonizing ways. After Natty goes against her father’s law, she tells Edwards to “tell the Leather-Stocking he has friends as well as judges in us” (349). Though she originally questions her father’s imprisonment of Natty, she eventually accepts Temple’s benevolent paternalist reasoning, and drops her well-reasoned argument against Natty’s imprisonment for loyalty to her father.

Temple’s colonialism manifests itself most obviously in the questions of land ownership which arise in the text. This seems appropriate, for what is colonialism at its base level if not a dominant group taking control of land from a less powerful group? Natty, a hunter on the lands long before Temple cheaply purchased them from the state, and Mohegan, the only remaining member of the once powerful Mohicans, raise questions about Temple’s rights to the land. The critic Douglas Buchholtz points out that conflicts between Natty and Billy Kirby, “a semi-proletarian, dependent on capitalist development and labor and commodity markets,” also speak to the problem of land ownership: “While in socio-historical terms, the Billy Kirby-Judge Temple-Natty Bumppo conflict encapsulates the overall struggle in early American society between subsistence hunters and farmers (Indian and white), that is, the nascent proletariat and the bourgeoisie...” (1). The chief conflict resulting from Temple’s ownership concerns the waste

and commercialization of the land, dramatized repeatedly through the pigeon shoot, the fishing of the Otsego Lake, the production of honey, etc.

But the issues of colonialism which surface in the text go beyond land ownership to include advocating for strong racial and class lines. The Temple family is the aristocracy—white, wealthy, and in power. Elizabeth is only fit to associate with people of her class, a distinction which both she and her father perpetuate. Thus her only companion is Louisa, who is sent away at the end of the novel to “meet with such society, and form such a connection, as may be proper for one of her years and character” (Ch. XLI). The significance of Elizabeth’s status is dramatized in her interaction with the servant Remarkable Pettibones, who wishes to challenge Elizabeth’s old world distinction of “mistress of the house,” but is swiftly shut down by Temple, who orders her to address the youth as “Miss Temple” (Ch. IX). Temple clearly commands respect in town, shown when he enters the Bold Dragoon and those who had spoken against him are silenced. The European characters, who offer nothing to the plot but are characterized as stereotypes of their nationality, make up the majority of the upper class; members of the privileged old world, they are automatically fit to associate with Temple.

The text’s stratum extends into race. The critic Chester H. Mills argues that “the Leatherstocking Tales are novels that can also be considered as having a specific design or of serving a ‘white’ purpose; and that is to put the red man, the black man, and the white man in their proper social relation with each other” (438). Mills points to Cooper’s depictions of the black characters, Temple’s servant Agamemnon and the independent Abraham Freeborn, as examples of how other races are emasculated and fixed, though free, in the lowest class: “Mottled with large brown spots” and with “nostrils...dilated, until they covered the greater part of the diameter of his countenance,” “Brom” is more dragon than human (Cooper 194); for

Agamemnon, referred to by Richard as a “black dog” and who later crawls out of a doghouse (Ch. XVI), “the reader is made to conceive of this freed black man as being nothing more than a substitute for a dead dog” (Mills 441). Another example would be when Brom tries to defend his business and refers to himself as a “nigger,” the narrator describes him as “making that appeal to the justice of his auditors which the degraded condition of his caste so naturally suggested”; the word “caste” suggests feudal, definitely non-American ideas of a rigid social hierarchy (Cooper 195). The text also mentions “three or four subordinate menials, mostly black,” but these characters are mere set-pieces; we never learn their stories nor indeed hear of them again (58).

Though Mills asserts that “red-white boundaries in Cooper's *Leather-stocking Tales* are similar to the black-white boundaries previously discussed,” and states that the depictions of both function as “entertainment value” for Cooper, I would argue that there is an inherent difference in the way that the text treats black and native characters, and that it serves as an illustration of the effects of colonialism (442). The black characters are fully immersed in Temple's society, and seem to accept their positions in the lowest class. “Aggie,” ever “with a cheerful grin upon his chilled features” (Cooper 14), seems blissfully happy about being Temple's servant, and may be compared to “mirth of Brom,” who is “completely overcome[ing]” by the excitement of the turkey shoot (Ch. XVII). John Mohegan, on the other hand, still operates on the margins of society, able to defy the sense of white ownership which the text suggests for the black characters. For example, in the church when “observing a vacant seat next to the Judge, he took it, in a manner that manifested his sense of his own dignity,” which is something we would never expect of the black characters (Ch. XI). The text supports my distinction between the statuses of the black and native characters when Richard says, “you sorely would not make the youth eat with the blacks! He is part Indian, it is true; but the natives hold the negroes in great contempt.

No, no; he would starve before he would break a crust with the negroes" (Ch. XVIII). I see the position of the black characters as a representation of what would happen to natives if they were to submit to being fully colonized. Defined racial and class lines are a component of Temple's colonialism which the outsider characters have the opportunity to defy through their marginal existence.

2. Construction of Anticolonialism

Despite Cooper's privileged construction of colonial figures and ideas within the text, those figures and ideas do not go unchallenged by Mohegan, Edwards, and Natty. The last of his people, Mohegan has been forced in some ways to assimilate to the dominant white culture. Described as having "a mixture of the civilized and savage states" in dress and habit, he becomes a Christian and allows his name to be changed from the symbolic "Chingachgook," which is said to "recall[ed] the idea of his nation in ruins," to the flavorless, condescending "Indian John." From his introduction as "a child of the forest" with "glowing eyes," we see become the victim of white colonialism as he gets drunk at the bar, playing into the stereotype of the drunk Indian (Ch. VII). Mohegan himself creates the link between his ruin and white culture when he says, "the white man brings old age with him—rum is his tomahawk!" (Ch. XVI).

Though he is perhaps the weakest of the three outsider figures in terms of anticolonialism, Mohegan's heritage and experiences allow him to speak with against white colonialism with the most authority. In the same conversation with Edwards as the previous quote, Mohegan further condemns white colonialism, saying,

Then John was a man. But warriors and traders with light eyes followed them. One brought the long knife and one brought rum. They were more than the pines on the mountains; and they broke up the councils and took the lands, The evil spirit was in their

jugs, and they let him loose. Yes yes—you say no lie, Young Eagle; John is a Christian beast. (Ch. XVI)

And though it may be too extreme to say, as Mills does, that Mohegan is “a decadent, drink-corrupted remnant of a vanquished race who—to civilized society—remains wild, violent, and deceitful,” it is true that the colonizing figures never seem to be able to get a handle on him (443). He also seems to defy class status, exemplified through his sitting with Temple at church, as was mentioned previously. Though Mohegan is situated on the outskirts of the text, proper attention is given to him at his death. Mohegan defies the Christian beliefs of the white dominant culture and the wishes of his friends; in looking toward the “happy hunting grounds” and not a Christian heaven, Mohegan’s final stance is in solidarity of his people (Ch. XXXVIII).

In contrast to the weak but knowledgeable position of Mohegan, Edwards has the ability and the drive for action. He openly defies Temple in the name of principle, such as when he refuses to sell the honor of the deer’s death (Ch. I). Often with a haughty manner before Temple, we believe that it is because of these principles that “the youth entertained an unusual and deeply seated prejudice against the character of the Judge” (Ch. XXV). That he is rumored to be a native/white “half-breed” represents his Indian sympathies combined with his ability to assimilate into the dominant white culture (Ch. XXIX). Able to mingle with, and gain the respect of, the “civilized” likes of the Temple family, Edwards has the ability to create change from within the community. Repeatedly referred to as “the youth” and described as having “every indication of the most robust and enduring health,” Edwards represents the future potential of the anticolonialist movement (Ch. I).

Despite the anticolonial qualities of Mohegan and Edwards, it is Natty Bumppo that we look to as the primary figure of opposition to Temple. Natty vocalizes objections to several

facets of Temple's colonialism, including the alteration of the native landscape, gun and game laws, and white hypocrisy towards the Indians. These three issues are addressed in this piece of dialogue from Natty:

Well, I'm mistrustful, John... They say that there's new laws in the land, and I'm sartin that there's new ways in the mountains. One hardly knows the lakes and streams, they've altered the country so much. I must say I'm mistrustful of such smooth speakers; for I've known the whites talk fair when they wanted the Indian lands most. This I will say, though I'm a white myself, and was born nigh York, and of honest parents, too. (Ch. XVI)

He acts as a voice of morality in the text, staying firm in his beliefs even when others waver, such as when Temple and even Edwards participate in the pigeon shoot. "Unable to keep his sentiments to himself," Natty admonishes Temple with, "Put an ind, Judge, to your clearings. Ain't the woods His work as well as the pigeons? Use, but don't waste" (Ch. XXII). Nor is Natty afraid to criticize Temple himself, as when he says after being presented with the Judge's warrant, "that man loves the new ways, and his betterments, and his lands, afore his own flesh and blood" (Ch. XXX).

The "morality of Natty" recurs several times in the text, confronting colonizing figures with poignant questions that pose a threat to their ongoing reach for expansion (Ch. XXII). In doing so, Natty is able to defy society's class system and the fact that he is "simple, unlettered, even ignorant" (Ch. XXXI). We see him not as impoverished, but as a model of self-sufficiency. Natty's political and moral separation from the society is embodied in the image of his hut, physically on the margins of society and the one place which even the reader is barred from

entering. We believe that Natty's determination to prevent intruders into his house, such as Billy Kirby and Hiram Doolittle, is in the name of the individual's right to privacy.

Despite that they are isolated from society, the strength of these three characters come from their togetherness. They often operate as a group, providing a united front to reinforce and support each other. Natty and Edwards ban together against Temple in the debate about the buck, and Edwards alludes to their strong friendship with Mohegan when he says, "I have a friend who would be uneasy were he to hear that I am hurt and away from him" (20). Edwards is so connected to the elder men that even after he takes up residence with the Temples, and seems to easily assimilate to his life there, "his nights were often spent in the hut of Leather-Stocking" (Ch. XIX). The strength of the group is so much as to cause suspicion and anxiety in colonialists like Richard. When he sees the three of them conversing in the forest, he insists on listening in on their conversation, reasoning, "It is my duty to preserve the peace of the country, and see the laws executed. These wanderers frequently commit depredations" (183). Like its members, the group itself resists easy classification. In light of the society's racial barriers, multi-racial quality of the group threatens Richard's neat "system" (Ch. XVI). In creating a counterculture in which real world skills like hunting supersede the importance of class or race, the group challenges the very logic of colonialism and the Temple family's dominance.

For much of the novel, it's not clear just how much faith we are supposed to put into the anticolonial forces. Yet with Temple, disconnected as he is from nature and buying into Richard's conspiracy theory, it seems clear that the text does not present him a faultless colonizing figure. This may cause us to give more weight to the anticolonial forces.

3. The revelatory scene and its impact

In a matter of moments, this precarious balance between colonial and anticolonial forces in the text is altered in favor of the former; it is revealed that Natty had been harboring in his hut Edwards' grandfather, and his former master of many years, Major Effingham. Edwards' is, in fact, an Effingham—the grandson of the major and the son of Colonel Effingham, the former owner of Temple's land and Temple's business partner. The elder Effingham had once saved Mohegan's life, and was thus adopted as the native's son—Edwards' only link to the Delaware Indians. Edwards is, then, wholly white and had a privileged upbringing in society, only retreating to the company and habits of Natty after his father died. All along, it seems, Edwards, Mohegan, and Natty had been operating under the belief that Effingham, and thus Edwards, “was the rightful proprietor of this very soil on which we stand,” and that Temple wrongly came to possess it (Ch. XL). Learning this, Temple reveals his will, through which he long ago bequeathed half of his land to the decedent of Colonel Effingham, and promises to honor it. The importance of the scene cannot be overestimated; it has the potential to change our perspectives of Mohegan, Edwards, Natty, and Temple, and challenges the strength and legitimacy of the anticolonial forces in the novel.

John Mohegan's death does not prevent his memory from being compromised by the revelations when we realize that he didn't stand for what we had thought. Although the text suggests that Mohegan had been advocating for his people's rights to the land, or perhaps for the idea that the land should not be owned at all, in fact he was simply supporting a different kind of white colonialism. “Go to the highest hill, and look around you,” he says. “All that you see, from the rising to the setting sun, from the head-waters of the great spring, to where the 'crooked river' is hid by the hills, is [Edwards'].” This quote gains new significance when we realize that Edwards' ownership is presumed to be due not to his Indian blood, but to his parentage. It would

seem that if Mohegan ever held hope for subverting the forces of white colonialism, it was long ago defeated. His death, then, becomes not a powerful act of resistance, but a submission, an acknowledgment that the time in which he could have made a difference has long passed. This is especially significant in that, as Edwards says, “revenge is a virtue with an Indian. They are taught, from infancy upward, to believe it a duty never to allow an injury to pass unrevenged” (Ch. XII). Mohegan does not achieve revenge at the end; from his beginnings as a fierce warrior and “the greatest man in his nation,” his end is a testament to his disempowerment by colonialism (Ch. XL).

The most radical social change as result of the revelatory scene happens to Edwards, who transforms in a moment from a classless, racially ambiguous outsider to a white aristocratic heir. It is worth noting that the Effingham family is shown to historically have put great importance on class, especially against the standards of the colonies: “They were one of the few families then resident in the colonies who thought it a degradation to its members to descend to the pursuits of commerce; and who never emerged from the privacy of domestic life unless to preside in the councils of the colony or to bear arms in her defense” (Ch. II).

The truth about Edwards’ parentage suggests that he acted chiefly from personal, and not anticolonial, interests. This is shown by the fact that, after Temple explains his side of the story, Edwards’ former “deeply seated prejudice” against the Judge vanishes (Ch. XXV), and he admits, “It is true, Judge Temple, that my opinions of your conduct have been staggered by what [Major Hartmann] has told me.” This calm admission is replaced by tears of joy and Edwards’ cry of “God bless him!” after he reads the will and finds that his wealth and status have, in a moment, drastically increased. In this new light, Edwards’ haughty, defiant attitude toward Temple loses anticolonial significance and casts him as a disgruntled adolescent. Given that he

alone, besides perhaps Major Effingham, will benefit from the situation, it is not unfair to say that the chief conflicts in the text are the result of his self-interested desires. Though Edwards claims that he meets reveal of his grandfather “reluctantly,” we may understandably question our belief in that description; indeed, no other event imaginable could seem to better meet what we now understand as his desires (Ch. XL).

Edwards’ transformation away from colonialism is symbolized by the changing of his name. Oliver Edwards becomes Edward Oliver Effingham; we find that, for his name as well as his principles, we have been led to misinterpret him entirely. The latter name, steeped connotations of upper class and the legacy of his fathers, is acknowledged as supreme by the text. After the reveal, Edwards’ speech is tagged as, “said Edwards, or rather Effingham, as we must now call him” (Cooper 444). From that point forward, the “youth” is referred to by name as either “Oliver” or “Effingham;” even Natty accepts the new social order when he refers to Elizabeth in the final chapter as “Madam Effingham” (459). It perhaps goes without saying that Edwards’ old nickname “Young Eagle” is forgotten in the moment of parting.

Cooper uses naming to further comment on Edwards’ transformation when Edwards mispronounces John Mohegan’s name while reading the native’s gravestone:

"You shall hear: This stone is raised to the memory of an Indian Chief of the Delaware tribe, who was known by the several names of John Mohegan Mohican——'

"

“Mo-hee-can, lad, they call themselves! 'hecan," [Natty said.]

" ‘Mohican; and Chingagook—‘ "

" 'Gach, boy; 'gach-gook; Chingachgook, which interpreted, means Big-sarpent.

The name should be set down right, for an Indian's name has always some meaning in it."

"I will see it altered. 'He was the last of his people who continued to inhabit this country; and it may be said of him that his faults were those of an Indian, and his virtues those of a man.' " (457-458)

It would seem strange that Edwards, who considered Mohegan a “friend” and presumably had a great deal of exposure to Delaware language, would mispronounce the native’s name, but his error becomes more significant when Natty points out the importance which an Indian’s name carries (Ch. I). The fact that Mohegan’s name is immortalized incorrectly in the stone illustrates that, despite his final act of defiance to white ways, the whites truly had the last say. It was the white colonialists who decided that “his faults were those of an Indian.” Edwards promises to have the name changed, but we never see this promise fulfilled within the text; the youth’s colonial objective has taken priority over showing deference to the last of the Mohicans.

Beyond his move away from anticolonialism, Edwards is also poised to become a colonizing figure himself, as he is situated as the next Temple figure through his union with Elizabeth. Critic Nina Baym argues that, though the women of Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* are not full members of society, they are “the chief signs, the language of social communication between males,” and that “the chief ‘statement’ of the social language is, of course, marriage” (698). Indeed, Temple symbolically joining the hands of his daughter and Edwards seems to be little more than an extension of the monetary transaction between Edwards and himself. We can hardly give him credit for not realizing that, in a union between the two youths, Temple will have lost nothing and turned a purported adversary into another colonizing force. We see Edwards embrace the colonizing role in Chapter XLI, which I will discuss later.

But does Elizabeth also embrace the role of the colonizer? Baym says of Elizabeth, “it is her existence that guarantees the formation of an artificial group, a linking of men which is other

than the natural family and which, simply because it is *not* natural, is the base of civilization” (700). It would seem that, despite her naturist sympathies and considerable role in the plot of the story, Elizabeth’s true purpose in the text is merely to assure that Temple’s colonialism is continued through her marriage and offspring. Of course, even this advantageous economic gain could not be achieved if the stars of race and class congruity were not aligned. Edwards admits, “smiling,” that his Indian blood is purely symbolic (446). “It is proof of Elizabeth’s proper breeding that she senses the aristocrat beneath Oliver Edwards’ pretense of lower-class identity;” yet she would not dare love him until she gains the approval of her benevolent paternalist (Baym 700).

It may go without saying that with the individual transformations which Mohegan, Edwards, and Natty (discussed in the following section) undergo after the revelatory scene, the group itself becomes fractured and an object of our distrust. We learn that the conflict between the group and Temple was the result of a mistaken supposition, the conspirational belief that Temple was out to steal land and money away from Edwards. Having largely followed Temple from the beginning of the story, we know how far this is from the truth. The revelatory scene makes the three outsider characters ridiculous, and effectively takes a speculating eye off of Temple, obscuring the lingering issue of conservation. Though Natty did truly seem to have the fate of the environment at heart, he still played into Edwards’ conspiracy theory and largely did the work of harboring Major Effingham.

The revelatory scene also causes us to give more credence to the extreme colonizers such as Richard and Hiram Doolittle, themselves long viewed as ridiculous by the reader for thinking that there is something in Natty’s hut. By effectually proving them right, the outsider group forces us to acknowledge that Richard and Hiram were right to be suspicious. We may even

support the pair's invasion of Natty's home and personal property, if we imagine that another character could have been concealing something more sinister. Finally, the group also becomes fractured from within, as the two remaining members lose their former intimacy and eventually separate for good.

4. **A different perspective on Natty Bumppo**

The fall away from anticolonialism which we least expect, and which is therefore the most crippling to lingering hopes for its cause, is that of Natty Bumppo. Cooper critics have generally taken as a given that Natty is morally uncompromised by the end of the novel, an issue largely eclipsed by an ongoing debate over whether Natty may be considered the epic hero. His retreat into the wilderness is seen, in terms of colonialism, as an extension of the anticolonialism that he has stood for all along. For example, pointing to his several acts of heroism, critic Douglas Buchholtz writes, "Natty's ultimate role in the novel is to unveil the false objectivity of bourgeois legality, justice and economic rationality, and to reveal the material, class interest which underlies them." Despite that his role switches to become "one of the central antagonists in its climax," Buchholtz contends, "that is a relatively small price for the socio-ideological insight Cooper achieves through him" (1). The critic Robert H. Zoellner summarizes this view of Natty: "recent criticism has produced an archetypal hero, essentially asocial in texture, who stands outside the stream of human history, springing out of the soil of his primordial forests into an isolate and static purity" (398).

I do not argue against the idea that Natty as a character offers "socio-ideological insight," or that some of his actions may be considered heroic. Yet these positive attributes come at a much larger price than Buchholtz suggests—the price of completely dismantling the anticolonial forces in the text. While it was important for Cooper to create an almost mythical, anticolonial

character, it was more important for the author to reveal Natty as being more myth than substance. By the end of the novel, our image of him as the ultimate self-sufficient, independent figure is shattered; he is shown to be less anticolonial than we had believed, but perhaps more importantly, he is completely stripped of any power we had imagined him as having against colonial forces. Whether or not we consider Natty heroic, it is more important to understand that, in light of the power relations in the text, Natty's disempowerment signals the death knell for the anticolonial cause.

One of the chief ways that the text disempowers Natty is by revealing that he was a longtime servant of Major Effingham, and was not raised in the woods, as we have been led to believe. Even more shocking, Natty has, for the length of the text, reverted to his servant status by caring for the major. The text is clear on the implications of becoming a servant; recall the image of Agamemnon blubbing before his "massa" (Ch. IV), or Edwards verbally aligning being a servant to slavery: " 'I will submit,' said the youth; 'I will forget who I am... Yes, yes; I will become his bonds man—his slave, Is it not an honorable servitude, old man?'" (Ch. XVIII). Though Temple mirrors the reader when he says that he had thought of Natty as simply "a man of the woods, and one who lived by hunting," Edwards is unaccountably "in evident surprise" over this (Ch. XL). It would seem that though his colonizing agency had been dormant, Edwards thought that a fellow colonizer would see Natty as he has evidently seen him all along—a servant of his family.

Though some may argue that time has equalized the social statuses of Natty and Effingham, the text depicts Effingham in a socially elevated manner. Despite that he is at the age which "brings the mental imbecility of childhood," his face is "grave and dignified," and his comments, though incoherent, serve as a reminder of his former wealth and importance. Natty's

act of taking Effingham under his care is due not to a general sense of benevolence toward an old friend, but to his internalized sense of dominance. Edwards attributes “his [maintaining] his old master in secret” to a continued heed to the importance of class status, “for even he could not bear to exhibit to the world, in his poverty and dotage, a man whom a whole people once looked up to with respect” (Ch. XL). As Swann contends, Natty “feels himself to owe almost feudal service to old Major Effingham” (115).

The servant/master relationship between Natty and Major Effingham is solidified in the major’s gravestone, which reads in part,

“The morning of his life was spent in honor, wealth, and power; but its evening was obscured by poverty, neglect, and disease, which were alleviated only by the tender care of his old, faithful, and upright friend and attendant Nathaniel Bumppo. His descendants rest this stone to the virtues of the master, and to the enduring gratitude of the servant.”

(Ch XLI)

Beyond describing Natty as an “attendant” and “servant,” the epitaph insinuates that some of Natty’s best characteristics are those of a loyal servant. Indeed, we may find that the reasons that we have admired him all along may be servant-like: “he knows his friends, and never deserts them, even if it be his dog,” Edwards says (Ch. XXXI). It is interesting that the epitaph ambiguously mentions the “enduring gratitude of the servant,” as opposed to “enduring gratitude for the servant.” Though we might expect that the carving is expressing gratitude for Natty, the word “of” insinuates that everything that Natty has done for Major Effingham is due to his gratitude to his former master. Natty’s response to hearing the elegant epitaph is such: “The Leather-Stocking started at the sound of his own name, and a smile of joy illuminated his wrinkled features” (Ch. XLI). His reaction recalls the simpleminded joy of another servant,

Agamemnon; along with a reminder of the fact that he can't read, it draws attention to his uneducated, lower class status.

Natty's apparent simple-mindedness is part of what causes the critic Robert H. Zoellner to deem Natty as having "moral infantilism," which causes him to "look[s] merely foolish" when he grapples with the complex moral questions which the text raises (401). While Natty is perhaps the only one who is shown to be an advocate for, and believer in, anticolonialism, even he cannot resist perpetuating the dominance and superiority of the upper class. We as readers had bought into the anticolonialist fantasy which he exemplified, and perhaps we were as duped as Natty was by his "moral infantilism"; we ourselves become the moral infantilists, believing in a solution which the denouement swiftly declares to be impossible. Though Natty does compromise his values by accepting servitude, we cannot help but to sympathize with him because we ourselves are in the same position of disillusionment.

Natty does not only inherently contradict his anticolonial rhetoric by resuming his servant status, but he also puts his anticolonial values at materially at risk in the name of his master. It is, indeed, amazing to think of the lengths to which Natty went to protect Effingham. When Natty submits to the stocks, it originally seems as though he chooses facing the law and court over sacrificing his right to privacy. It was not his principles which guided him, however, but the desire to protect Effingham; the pitiful scenes in which Natty is condemned by the court and subsequently jailed become not the result of an act of defiance in the name of personal liberty, but of a servant sacrificing himself and his happiness for his master. In this light, many of Natty's actions which originally seem to be based in the principles of individualism may in fact be in the service of his master, even his early bold action of insisting on keeping the deer. As Swann writes, "Natty is, in effect, the Major's gamekeeper" (115).

Despite that only moments before the reveal, Natty throws his life on the line to protect Major Effingham, afterwards he is silenced. Once the only character in the society able to challenge Temple and defy class status, Natty becomes a lower class mute body whose task is to stop at nothing to protect his master—and not from death or injury, but from something much less threatening—discovery. After disillusioning the reader of Natty's agency, the novel loses interest in him and follows the young couple to a successful completion of the colonialism plot. The next time that we hear Natty speak is the same scene in which he banishes himself from society.

Natty's self-banishment, which has been viewed by critics as a noble action which adheres to his values, it is in fact a retreat which acknowledges his disempowerment and the victory of white colonialism. The text seems to mock him as he “drew nigh him with a confident, reasoning air, as if what he had to say would silence all objections” and gives a hazy plan about finding the big lakes. Emphasizing again his simplicity (Natty says, “This, then, is some of the new-fashioned money that they've been making at Albany, out of paper! It can't be worth much to they that hasn't larning!”), the text trivializes the eloquent statements which Natty does make. More important, however, is Natty's reference to the day when “justice shall be the law, and not power,” his last words to Elizabeth and Edwards, in which he admits his own disempowerment. Natty wishes to retreat farther into the wilderness, yet we know that as colonialism continues to triumph over anticolonialists, systematizing people like Natty into the lower class, there is limited time that Natty will have somewhere to retreat to (Ch. XLI).

Our disillusionment of Natty may cause us to look more closely at his previous conduct and admit that he is not a champion of equality, as we have been led to believe. Critics have generally agreed that the wilderness allows for class and racial equality between Natty and

Mohegan. Mills writes, “The white man of the wilderness can accept the Indian as equal...because in the wilderness both are indeed closer to equality than in white civilization” (443). Yet several quotes from Natty direct us otherwise; despite being the native’s closest friend, Natty seems to view himself as racially superior. Natty says of Mohegan, “This is the way with all the savages; give them liquor, and they make dogs of themselves. Well, well—the day will come when right will be done; and we must have patience.” Significantly, he “spoke in the Delaware language,” so he ensures that his derogatory comment is understood by Mohegan (Ch. XVI). Edwards calls Natty “prejudiced,” though the contextual significance is unclear. The text acknowledges that Natty’s prejudice is ironic, since “The Leather-Stocking...had imbibed unconsciously, many of the Indian qualities, though he always thought of himself as of a civilized being,” yet in doing so it also reinforces the stereotype that Indians are uncivilized (Ch. XLI). Perhaps it is true that in the wilderness Natty treats the other as his equal, but it is now impossible for us to regard either without the context of white civilization in which they participate. It becomes clear that the idea of racial equality between Natty and Mohegan was itself a fantasy, and that Natty is an advocate of white superiority.

Critic Robert H. Zoellner’s argument, which also touches off against common critical analysis of Natty, is helpful in his discussion of how Natty is compromised by the text. Natty is morally compromised not by going against his beliefs, Zoellner argues, but by having a “moral system whose essence is permanent prematurity, and [Cooper] solves the problem he has created for himself only by allowing Natty to regress into an increasingly asociality.” Natty’s “moral infantilism,” as well as his view of civilization as evil, contrasts with the mature morality of Judge Temple and even the Indians, who possess a “mature stoicism and breadth of vision of which Natty is congenitally incapable.” Temple is a mediator, “insisting that wilderness and

civilization be brought into harmonious conjunction without the despoliation of the one or the consequent debauching of the other”; by killing the deer out of season, Natty is placed in the camp that would contribute to that despoliation (402). That “Natty is at his worst” in *The Pioneers* is significant because that was how Cooper originally conceived of him (406). Reflecting on Natty throughout the *Leatherstocking Tales*, Zoellner writes, “As often as Natty breaks loose from the societal structure in which Cooper is writing, accumulating dignity and moving in the direction of the mythic-epic, Cooper unconsciously puts him, rather forcefully, back in his place” (420).

Where Zoellner and I differ, however, is that he frames his argument in terms the debate about Natty’s heroism. Zoellner argues that Natty is not a mythic hero, but a fractured figure resulting from Cooper’s ideological and moral differences from the character he created as his hero. He views Natty as the antagonist of *The Pioneers*, who shifts to become a protagonist in the next novel in one of many examples of Cooper’s waffling on Natty’s idealization. I argue that whether Natty is the protagonist or the antagonist is not the crucial issue. It is true that Natty at times acts heroically in the text, such as when he twice saves Elizabeth, but our eventual disillusionment of his character as an anticolonial agent prevents him from being the hero of the text. Yet to call Natty the antagonist, though he does act against Temple, would be to give him too much credit, for he is simultaneously disempowered. More important to Cooper than whether or not we view Natty as a hero, is our understanding that he is defeated as an anticolonial force.

4. Textual Implications

The end result of the text’s disruption of the anticolonial forces is to allow colonialism to emerge as the ideal outcome for the society. While our unequivocally positive view of Natty is shaken at the end, Temple is at his best, for the revelatory scene also changes our views of his

actions throughout the text. Though Temple, ever “full of activity and enterprise,” is characterized by his drive toward expansion and cultivation of natural resources, we are given proof in the will that he is not an inherently selfish character (Ch. II). He insinuates that the reason he even acquired the land in the first place was for the good of Colonel Effingham, explaining, “If the cause of this country was successful, the trust was sacred with me, for none knew of thy father's interest, if the crown still held its sway, it would be easy to restore the property of so loyal a subject as Colonel Effingham,” and even Edwards is convinced by “this undeniable testimony of the good faith of Marmaduke” (Ch. XL). In granting half of his land to Effingham, Temple perhaps emerges as the hero of our tale. Though I reiterate that in my argument, power relationships supersede heroism, I mention Temple's heroism to show how it may further raise his already elevated social stance and power over the other characters.

While paving the way for an ideal colonized society, the novel symbolically defeats threats to that form of colonialism beyond the diegetic action. The deaths of Mohegan and Effingham close the chapter on English dominance and Indian land claims, as well as English sympathies; Mohegan was joined to Edwards not through anticolonialism, but through love for the Effingham family and belief in their colonizing rights. It is significant that both were laid to rest next to each other, joined in their sympathies and in their ultimate defeat. Natty, too, may be considered the last of his “race,” for though Temple claims that men of the woods are “too common to excite surprise,” Natty is the only one we meet who seems to pose a threat to Templeton (Ch. XL). As Swann notes, “the resolution of the inheritance plot does not hide the fact that the central conflict between the man with a gun and the law (Temple's law) is not obviously resolved” (116). The lingering questions which Natty posed, even with his newly discovered servant status, present a challenge to the neat denouement which the novel strives for.

Thus, though the newly-wedded Effinghams are grieved by it, it serves the novel to have Natty leave the outskirts of Templeton.

Though the novel tempers our view of Natty as an anticolonial force, in the end it seeks more to pity him than to destroy him. Even with his nature skills which enabled him to save Elizabeth twice, Natty and his cause cannot survive in an inevitably colonized America. Raising anticolonial forces only to defeat them is an important way that the text establishes meaning. Yet there may be another function of the fantasy of anticolonialism. From its position, confident in its colonial stance and no longer threatened by the past, the novel makes room for nostalgia about the past by acknowledging Indian land claims and some of the dangers of colonialism. The three outsider characters have the important function of bringing related issues such as conservatism and gun laws into diegetic conversation; and despite that Mohegan turns out to be a supporter of white colonialism, he also has the opportunity throughout the novel to voice the grievances of his people and to personify white guilt.

Yet the text stops short of explicitly attributing the Indian's demise to white colonialism. Chapter VII's short history of the natives of the area, concentrates on the conflicts between the Five Nations and points to the "war, time, disease, and want [that] had conspired to thin their number." Furthermore, this memorial is only possible because threats to colonialism are destroyed; interestingly, though the text suggests that Native Americans no longer figure in colonial society by 1823 when the book was written, the infamous Trail of Tears didn't occur until five years later. Though acknowledging some of the pitfalls on colonialism, and mourning for what was lost, the novel concludes that colonialism is the best and most realistic future for the society.

The novel remedies in part lingering fears about colonialism by resurrecting Edwards and Elizabeth as the future of the aristocracy in Templeton. Though Zoellner sees Temple as the true mediator between civilization and savagism, I argue that Edwards and Elizabeth are the ideal colonizers for Cooper. Racially secure in the social stratosphere but with demonstrated naturist sentiments, the pair even seems to mollify Natty. In his last words to them, he says,

Trust in God, madam, and your honorable husband, and the thoughts for an old man like me can never be long nor bitter. I pray that the Lord will keep you in mind—the Lord that lives in clearings as well as in the wilderness—and bless you, and all that belong to you, from this time till the great day when the whites shall meet the red-skins in judgment, and justice shall be the law, and not power. (Ch. XLI)

Acknowledging that there can be good in civilization, he gives his good wishes to the pair and seems to accept their ownership of the land (“all that belong to you.”). In a rare moment of clarity, Natty seems to understand that, no matter how noble his sentiments, the colonialists will always overpower him. His fight was lost long ago, perhaps when the “red-skins” first sold the land to the “whites.” He offers one last jab in his reminder of judgment time, perhaps as a reminder of what Cooper saw as a duty of the owners of the land to protect it and its resources.

In conclusion, my argument traces a downward trajectory of anticolonialism in the text. Given footing through the characters of Natty, Edwards, and Mohegan, it unravels itself as the characters drop their advances, and self-extinguishes. Anticolonialism is given a symbolic end with Natty’s retreat from society with two future colonizers looking on. It is this trajectory that we must trace despite the continuance of Natty’s character through the *Leatherstocking Tales*. Leaving the reader in the hands of the colonizers, with their last threat disappearing before their

eyes, was Cooper's idea of a happy ending.

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