



## THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS: CLASSICS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

*Uzbekistan State World Languages University*  
*Foreign language and literature: 3<sup>rd</sup> English faculty*  
*3<sup>rd</sup> year student **Baxtiyorova Nozima***  
*Supervisor: PhD, Associate professor*  
***Karimov Ulugbek Nusratovich***

**Abstract:** The article is devoted to the analysis of James Fenimore Cooper's novel "The Last of the Mohicans", which is one of the most important works of American romantic literature. The key themes of the novel are considered, such as the cultural clash between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of America, the tragedy of disappearing cultures, the conflict between civilization and nature, heroism and moral choice of the characters. Particular attention is paid to the images of Hawkeye, Chingachgook, Uncas and Magua, as well as their role in revealing philosophical questions about fate, survival and identity. The article analyzes the influence of the novel on literature and art, its significance in the criticism of colonialism and relevance for the modern reader.

**Keywords:** James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, American literature, romanticism, Indians, cultural clash, colonialism, nature and civilization, heroism, French and Indian War, Hawkeye, Chingachgook, vanishing cultures

James Fenimore Cooper's novel The Last of the Mohicans (1826) is one of the most famous works of American literature of the 19th century. Part of the Leatherstocking series, which tells the adventures of Nutty Bumppo, also known as Hawkeye. In this work, Cooper creates a gripping tale of friendship, honor, betrayal and the struggle for survival against the backdrop of the events of the French and Indian War (1754-1763).

The events of the novel take place in 1757, during the siege of the British fortress William Henry by French troops and their Indian allies. The story centers on the journey of two sisters, Cora and Alice Monroe, who are heading to their father, Colonel Monroe. They are accompanied by Major Duncan Hayward, the Indian tracker Hawkeye and two Mohicans - Chingachgook and his son Uncas. The travelers soon find themselves in a dangerous situation due to the betrayal of their guide Magua, a Huron Indian who defects to the French and seeks revenge on Colonel Monroe. The main task of the heroes is to survive in the harsh conditions of the wild forest, where they constantly face threats from both enemies and nature.

One of the central themes of the novel is the conflict between civilization and nature, European culture and indigenous peoples. Cooper shows how these worlds intertwine, but also come into conflict with each other. Hawkeye, despite his European origins, is deeply connected to Native American culture and nature. He lives according to the laws of the wild forest, becoming a bridge between two worlds.

The Mohicans in the novel symbolize the dying culture of the indigenous peoples of America. Uncas, "the last of the Mohicans," represents the last remnant of this vanishing civilization. His tragic fate emphasizes the inevitable destruction of Indian tribes under the pressure of colonial expansion. The fate of Uncas and

his father Chingachgook highlights the fragility of cultures in the face of historical change. Magua presents a more complex image. Although he serves as the main antagonist, his story is one of pain, humiliation, and a desire for revenge for the suffering inflicted on his people by the Europeans. Magua thus becomes the embodiment of the tragedy of colonization.

#### **Characters of the heroes:**

- Hawkeye (Natty Bumppo) is the embodiment of the idealized image of the "noble savage" - a person who lives in harmony with nature and follows moral principles. Despite his European roots, he rejects many features of colonial civilization, preferring freedom and wildness.
- Chingachgook and Uncas represent two generations of Indians for whom their native land is a sacred place. Chingachgook is a wise and experienced warrior who personifies tradition and the old order. Uncas, on the other hand, is young and full of energy, but his fate is determined by the disappearance of the culture of his ancestors.
- Magua is one of the most complex characters in the novel. His revenge and betrayal show how the brutal actions of the colonizers destroy the destinies of the indigenous people, while he himself becomes a victim of his inner demons.

The Last of the Mohicans was and remains an important work for understanding the history of American literature and culture. Cooper's novel asks questions about national identity, the nature of the American nation, and the price to pay for the expansion of civilization. His works laid the foundation for the genre of adventure literature and influenced many subsequent generations of writers and filmmakers. The Last of the Mohicans has also spawned numerous adaptations, from stage plays to films, the most famous of which is the 1992 film adaptation starring Daniel Day-Lewis as Hawkeye.

Continuing the theme of the influence of The Last of the Mohicans, it is worth noting that it touches on deeper questions about human nature and man's place in the world. Through the story of the clash between European civilization and the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Cooper explores the moral dilemmas faced by his characters and offers reflections on the essence of good and evil.

Although the novel was written at the beginning of the 19th century, when the idea of colonial expansion was still considered something heroic in society, Cooper skillfully shows the tragedy faced by the indigenous peoples of America. The Last of the Mohicans can be seen as an early example of criticism of colonialism, although the author did not seek to explicitly oppose it. He describes the consequences of European intervention in the lives of the Indians, demonstrating the destruction of their worldview and customs.

The story of Chingachgook and Uncas, the last of the ancient Mohicans, symbolizes the loss of an entire cultural heritage. Cooper emphasizes that in the struggle for land, resources and power, not only people die, but entire civilizations with their unique wisdom and culture disappear. This gives the novel a touch of tragic melancholy, calling into question the moral right to destroy those who lived on this land long before the arrival of Europeans.

#### **Nature as the central character**

One of the most striking aspects of the novel is its picturesque descriptions of the North American landscape. Unlike other works of his time, Cooper draws attention to the wildness and grandeur of the environment, which becomes not just a backdrop for events, but a full-fledged participant in the action. Forests, mountains and rivers are not just a setting, but symbols of freedom and the power of nature, before which humanity looks small and vulnerable. For heroes like Hawkeye and the Indians, nature is a home that must be respected and protected. Their attitude towards the land and the natural world contrasts sharply with the European view of nature as an object to be conquered and exploited. Cooper shows that living in harmony with nature is not a weakness, but a strength that helps you survive and maintain your identity in a world full of violence and destruction.

**Female characters and their role:** Although the focus of the novel is on the male characters, female characters also play an important role. Cora and Alice Monroe represent two different archetypes of women in the literature of the time. Cora is a brave and strong woman with an independent spirit, which makes her an interesting and multifaceted character. She is of mixed heritage, which also adds depth to her character, raising questions about racial and ethnic prejudice. In contrast, Alice is depicted as a more classic image of "lady virtue" - fragile and in need of protection. Through their interactions, Cooper shows the different

aspects of femininity and how women could cope with the challenges of war and wilderness. However, their roles in the plot mainly focus on how they influence the male characters, highlighting traditional gender stereotypes of the time. Epic denouement and philosophy of the end

The final chapters of the novel emphasize the tragedy of its main theme - the disappearance of indigenous peoples. The death of Uncas and Magua is the culmination not only of their personal stories, but also of the fate of an entire people. The tragic fate of Uncas symbolizes the end of an era and the loss of a unique cultural heritage that cannot be restored. Magua dies without finding satisfaction in his revenge, which emphasizes the meaninglessness of hatred and cruelty.

The last scene of the novel, where Chingachgook mourns the death of his son, evokes deep philosophical reflections on the inevitability of change and the finitude of all things. This scene resonates with the overall theme of the novel - despite greatness, wisdom and strength, even the most powerful cultures can be destroyed by time and historical circumstances.

The novel "The Last of the Mohicans" had a huge influence on literature, cinema and art in general. This novel became a seminal work for the adventure genre, which explores human interaction with wildlife and cultural differences. Storylines related to conflicts between civilization and nature, as well as the confrontation between different cultures, became the basis for many subsequent works of literature and cinema. Cinematic adaptations are some of the most prominent examples of the novel's cultural influence. One of the most famous is the 1992 film adaptation directed by Michael Mann, where Daniel Day-Lewis played the main role of Hawkeye. This film not only renewed interest in the novel, but also offered a new, modern interpretation of the characters and their motives. The film adaptation emphasized the heroic aspect of the characters, and also increased the emotional weight of the relationship between Uncas, Cora and Magua. The music and landscape photography made the film an icon of its time.

James Fenimore Cooper became one of the first authors who introduced the Western genre and adventure fiction involving Indians and colonists into American literature. In his novels, the nature of North America and the cultural differences between Indians and Europeans occupy a central place. This became the basis for many writers who later developed the theme of interaction between different cultures and nature. Cooper also inspired a wave of writers, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, who explored themes of loneliness, morality, and the impact of civilization on savagery. Its influence can be seen in later works such as Moby Dick, where the ocean and nature symbolize forces that oppose the human desire for dominance and control.

The Last of the Mohicans sparked interest in Native American culture and history, but also came under criticism for its stereotyping of indigenous peoples. Although Cooper sought to portray the Indians with respect, his approach to depicting their culture and character reflects the romantic and idealized notions of the "noble savage" that were popular at the time. Hawkeye, although of European descent, embodies the traits that are romanticized as "right" for Indians: honesty, courage, and closeness to nature.

At the same time, characters such as Magua embody negative stereotypes associated with cruelty and vindictiveness. Modern critics view these images as an example of how Europeans often viewed indigenous peoples through exoticism and preconceived notions. With the development of literature of the 20th and 21st centuries, many authors began to rethink this image. Modern writers and researchers, especially indigenous peoples, have begun to create more complex and realistic images of Indians that reflect their diverse culture and history. However, it cannot be denied that The Last of the Mohicans was an important milestone in the popularization of the theme of indigenous peoples and their tragic fate.

One of the most important themes of the novel remains the question of cultural and personal identity. Cooper shows how the characters try to maintain their heritage and identity in a changing world. This is especially true for Native American heroes such as Chingachgook and Uncas, who are on the verge of extinction but continue to follow the traditions of their people. Hawkeye, despite his European origins, identifies himself with nature and Native American culture. He rejects civilized norms and prefers a life based on harmony with the environment. This raises questions about what it means to be part of a culture, and how a person can combine different cultural influences.

**Conclusion:** The Last of the Mohicans is a work that transcends its time. In it, Cooper touches on topics that are relevant to this day: issues of cultural interaction, preservation of identity, man's relationship with nature, and moral choice in war. The novel teaches us that cultural conflicts and tragedies are not alien to

humanity, and that what is important is not only the victory itself, but also the cost at which it is achieved. Cooper's legacy lives on in contemporary works of art and literature, inspiring new authors and audiences to think about how people of different cultures can coexist in a world where nature and culture constantly collide and interact. "The Last of the Mohicans" remains a classic of world literature and one of the main symbols of American romantic prose, embodying the spirit of adventure and the tragedy of disappearing peoples.

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