



The Americanization of conventional gothic elements in *James Fenimore cooper's The pathfinder*

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Abstract

This paper examines the ways through which Cooper Americanizes the conventional gothic elements and techniques in *The Pathfinder*. It suggests that Cooper substitutes the American wilderness for the traditional castle or monastery used in European gothic fiction. With its atmosphere of threat and danger, the American wilderness is described as a gothic setting which produces feelings of fear and terror in the characters. Throughout the novel, Mabel Dunham and her companions feel insecure and uncertain in the wild and terrifying American natural landscapes. Cooper's use of suspense and the sublime emphasize the gothic aspect of the American wilderness. In his adaptation of the gothic techniques to an American setting, Cooper also substitutes the Native Americans for the traditional ghosts and specters. This paper suggests that the savagery and hellishness of Cooper's Indians make them as frightening as these mysterious apparitions. Their deviltry and ruthlessness intensify the characters' feelings of terror and heighten the gothic atmosphere of the American wilderness. They are described as spectral-looking figures whose sudden appearances and disappearances make them seem like goblins. Considering the use of distinctively native elements and materials, this paper argues that Cooper transforms the gothic mode by adapting it to the American environment.

Keywords: the *Pathfinder*, American wilderness, gothic, danger, threat, fear, terror, Indians

Introduction

James Fenimore Cooper's The Pathfinder: or, the Inland Sea is one of the most successful and bestselling American novels of the mid-nineteenth century. Published in 1840, it is the fourth of the Leather stocking Tales which feature the mythical life and adventures of the heroic frontiersman generally known as Leather stocking. Although Cooper's hero dies at the end of *The Prairie* and he is buried on the western plains in an Indian village, he is brought back to life in *The Pathfinder* in which he is resurrected at approximately the same age he is in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). Set in 1759 near Lake Ontario during the French and Indian War (Seven Years' War), *The Pathfinder* describes the colonial wars between England and France for possession and control of the North American continent. The actions and events depicted in this novel are subsequent to those that take place in *The Last of the Mohicans* which portrays the infamous massacre at Fort William Henry in which the surrendering British forces were mercilessly killed by the Huron Indians. As is the case in the latter novel, *The Pathfinder* describes the dramatic conflict between civilization and nature which took place during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The scenic descriptions and literary paintings of American natural landscapes are among the main reasons why the novel continues to be acclaimed since its publication. The *New-York Review*, for instance, labelled it "a true work of genius" and the *Knickerbocker* considered it as "an admirable production, full of fine pictures of exalted virtue in the humble paths of life" (Dekker 17-8). The French novelist and critic Honoré de Balzac also praised Cooper's charming and breath taking descriptions of the forests, rivers and falls which "supply a succession of marvellous tableaux, which in this work as in those that preceded it are quite inimitable" (qtd. in Valtiala 151). The favorable reception of *The Pathfinder* might also be

explained by its mixture of genres and its combination of different elements from forest and sea romances. In its descriptions of the brutal military conflicts between the French and the English, the novel also uses different modes such as the epic, the elegiac and the gothic.

The idea that *The Pathfinder* can be considered as a gothic novel might seem absurd due to the fact that Cooper does not use traditional gothic elements and conventions that are usually found in European gothic fiction. For example, there is no castle with secret passages and subterranean labyrinths where mystery reigns. There is no old manor house and no monastery where an evil monk persecutes an innocent heroine and threatens her by rape or other serious harm. Likewise, there are no ghosts, bleeding portraits or gloomy omens to frighten the characters as is the case in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk*. Moreover, Cooper does not use any supernatural or inexplicable events which highlight the superiority of irrationality over rationality in human life. Despite the absence of these traditional gothic elements in *The Pathfinder*, however, Cooper's novel might still be regarded as a gothic one due to the fact that they are not essential to this mode. As Donald A. Ringe argues, "[i]t is not the castle or the abbey that is important to the Gothic, but a sense of enclosed space that can be represented as well through other devices. In a similar fashion, the fear of ghosts and specters, of strange sights and sounds, is after all only the fear of the unknown and the unexpected. It too can be as easily expressed through other means" (Ringe). To a large extent, the absence of the traditional gothic elements in *The Pathfinder* justifies Ringe's claim. In fact, all of these elements are replaced with other means and devices which generate the feelings of insecurity and danger in the

characters. These feelings of fear and threat are undoubtedly more important to the gothic mode than the ways used to produce them. As Ringe puts it, the “sense of insecurity and danger, of a threat to the self, is what is important, not the external elements used to express it” (Ringe). By using different devices and techniques in his novels, Cooper evidently transforms the gothic mode and adapts it to the American environment.

Although Cooper had used some conventional gothic elements in some of his novels such as *The Spy*, *The Pilot* and *Lionel Lincoln*, which are reminiscent of European gothic fiction, he attempted to create a distinctively American gothicism in the *Leather Stocking Tales*. This attempt reflected his willingness to break away from the European gothic tradition and highlighted his stature as a typically American writer. In *The Pathfinder*, Cooper’s Americanization of the conventional gothic elements is noticeable mainly through his reliance on exclusively native materials which are suitable to the needs and conditions of the New World. Due to the fact that America lacked the ruins and old buildings of Europe, he relocated the gothic castle to the American wilderness. Although Cooper was not the first writer to use the American wilderness as a gothic setting, since Washington Irving and Charles Brockden Brown’s novels also attributed some gothic aspects to the American forest, he was the first to demonstrate that the American wilderness can be as effective as the haunted castle in gothic literature (White 107). With its atmosphere of threat and danger, it is as frightening as the secret passages and labyrinths of the European gothic castle or monastery. Unlike the early *Leather Stocking* novels such as *The Pioneers* (1823) and *The Prairie* (1827) in which Cooper relies mainly on mountain gothic in his descriptions of America’s natural scenery, *The Pathfinder* focuses on forest gothic which “looks to the interior of wooded groves” and enclosed landscapes which are “pictured like the interior of a Gothic cathedral” (Axelrad). In fact, the natural landscapes described in *The Pathfinder* are horizontal rather than vertical and do not contain any precipitous mountains, pinnacles or chasms. They are vast and sublime natural scenes which seem to be interminable. The gothic aspect of these scenes is emphasized by the savagery of the Native Americans whose brutality and mercilessness make them seem even more horrifying. Cooper’s focus on the Indians as purely American subjects further underlines his Americanization of the gothic and his use of distinctively native materials.

The American wilderness as a gothic setting

Throughout *The Pathfinder*, the American wilderness is described as a gothic setting which induces fear upon the people who enter it. In such an environment, danger can be expected in every place and at any time. Unused to the place, Mabel Dunham and her uncle Charles Cap feel insecure and threatened by a mysterious and inexplicable force which seems to increase the rapidity of a gloomy fate. From the beginning of the novel, Cooper articulates this idea by claiming that the long journey they attempt to make through the wilderness is “necessarily attended with danger” (11) and that they are walking beneath a “vast natural vault that was upheld by myriads of rustic columns” (15). By comparing the forest to a natural vault, Cooper implicitly suggests that the traditional haunted castle or monastery used in European gothic fiction are not in any way more frightening and terrifying than the American wilderness. This idea is further

underlined by the fact that the wilderness is so insecure and uncertain that Mabel and Cap are unable to distinguish between their friends and their foes. Travelling toward Fort Oswego under the guidance of a Tuscarora Indian named Arrowhead, for instance, Mabel and her party catch sight of a column of smoke rising over the tops of the trees but they are unable to determine whether the fire was lit by their allies or by their enemies and whether it is a sign of good or evil. During this scene, Cooper stresses the travellers’ feelings of danger and threat by claiming that not only silence but also greater caution and care are taken by each individual as they draw nearer to the spot where the fire is taking place. Cooper’s use of the gothic mode is evident mainly through his emphasis on the hazardous and risky situation of the whole party. In contrast to Cap’s contempt for the wilderness and his belief that it is only a “tame surface” (10) which is not more perilous than the Atlantic Ocean, Mabel thinks that it is as dangerous as the sea. When Cap claims that there are no gales, hurricanes and frightful animals like sharks and whales in the wilderness, likewise, Mabel argues that the forests are also rich in hidden dangers such as “beasts, Indians, Frenchmen, desperadoes, subterfuges, and ambushes [which] all lie in wait beneath the treetops” (Gilmore 60). Cap is evidently mistaken in his view of the wilderness and he is satirized for his underestimation of its hazards. In fact, the saltwater seaman gradually changes his opinion and admits the fact that it is as insecure as the Atlantic Ocean.

The scenes which illustrate the hazards of the American wilderness and the characters’ feelings of intense fear and threat are numerous in *The Pathfinder*. Among these scenes is the one in which Cooper describes the efforts of *Leather Stocking* and his companions to conceal themselves from the Iroquois Indians. As soon as *Leather Stocking*’s Indian friend Chingachgook apprises them that the Indians are on their trail and that they run the risk of an ambush, the fugitives become so frightened and terrified about certain death or captivity that they start trying to find ways of escaping the enemy. Landing on the strand of the Oswego River where the bend of the stream favored the objective of the party, Cooper states, *Leather Stocking* and his friends create an artificial cover in order to hide their canoes and to avoid the danger of being seen from the opposite direction of the river. The cover seems to be so effective and secure that *Leather Stocking*’s white companion Jasper Eau douce is unable to find it after finishing his task of lighting a fire near a fallen pine upstream in order to mislead their foes. Even Chingachgook does not find it easily despite his dexterity and his acute senses. The effectiveness and security of this artificial cover, however, seem to be only temporary as three Iroquois Indians arrive near the travellers’ hiding place and one of them suddenly stops after looking at some leaves that have drooped a little because of their exposure to the sun. In this gothic scene, Cooper underlines the precarious and critical situation of the fugitives by stating that “nothing sheltered the travellers, but the branches and leaves of plants so pliant, that they yielded to every current of air, and which a puff of wind, a little stronger than common, would have blown away” (62). When they first see the enemy Indians, the fugitives are compared to numerous breathing statues inside the cover. Mabel, Jasper and even the dogmatic and “narrow-minded” (Abel 370) Cap become the victims of gothic fear throughout the scene. Each one of them is depicted as being so scared and frightened that he is unable to move or even to speak in unguarded tones. The saltwater seaman,

for instance, is terrorized by the thought of being scalped by the Indians and he is at a loss what actions might be taken to save his life and the life of his companions. The gothic is undoubtedly the predominant mode used in the description of the perilous situation of the fugitives. The main function of this mode is to reveal the characters' feelings of insecurity and to highlight Cooper's vision of the wilderness as a "domain of danger and evil" (Babington 141).

The atmosphere of threat and danger with which the American wilderness is characterized is further underlined in Cooper's description of the Thousand Islands to which Sergeant Dunham and his party are sent by major Duncan of Lundie in a sailing expedition with the aim of relieving a post called Station Island. Despite the remote and concealed position of this island, the journeyers feel insecure and threatened by imminent and unexpected danger. Gothic fear is mostly represented through the character of Mabel whom Cooper portrays as susceptible to the slightest threat. When the Sergeant, Leather stocking and Jasper leave the island in order to intercept the French supply boats to Frontenac, her feelings of uneasiness and perturbation are heightened. Although she is accompanied by her uncle, Lieutenant Muir, Corporal McNab and three other soldiers to defend the island if it is discovered and attacked by the enemy, her fear of the unknown still looms large in her mind. Her apprehension becomes even more intense when Arrowhead's wife, the Dew of June, secretly joins her on the island and asks her to get immediately into the blockhouse as it is the only safe and secure place where she can protect herself from the rifles of the enemy. The Dew of June's warning about an upcoming attack and invasion of the island by the Iroquois Indians curdle Mabel's blood. Following the Dew of June's departure, Mabel's anxiety and in quietude are further intensified when she discovers a small piece of cloth which resembles a little flag fluttering at the branch of a tree. She becomes frightened by the idea that Arrowhead's wife might be false to her or that Jasper has betrayed the position of the island to the enemy. Due to the fact that Jasper has already been accused of treachery and sent below deck during the party's journey to Station Island on the Scud, the latter idea seems to be not only reasonable but also justified. Because of all these circumstances, Mabel's suspicions are aroused and her panic becomes so unbearable that she instantly seeks protection in the blockhouse with one of the soldiers' wives called Jennie.

The blockhouse scene might be considered as one of the key scenes which illustrate the gothic aspects of the American wilderness and the characters' feelings of intense fear and threat. In this scene, Mabel's worst fears are materialized when the Iroquois Indians unexpectedly and brutally attack the island and cause total chaos and confusion. As soon as the enemy Indians shoot Corporal McNab from an adjacent island, Mabel becomes so overwhelmed by terror that she cannot shriek or even tremble as she looks at the dead body of her fellow countryman. She seems to be in a state of unconsciousness and oblivion as she forgets about her own safety and thinks only about helping her dying companion. Cooper emphasizes her enormous fear by claiming that she had a feeling of "blind terror" from the beginning of the Indians' attack and that her heart continued to "beat tumultuously" which prevented her from "act [ing] collectedly" (339). Even when she hides herself in the seemingly secure blockhouse, her fright does not seem to be diminished as she hears the ceaseless reports of the Indians' rifles and becomes

alarmed about the fate of her party. Looking through one of the loopholes of the blockhouse, Cooper states, Mabel's blood "curdled" (340) at the sight of the dead bodies of the three soldiers lying at the side of Corporal McNab. The absence of Cap and Lieutenant Muir who are nowhere to be seen on the island further heightens the heroine's dread as she expects them have a similar fate to that of the soldiers. As Cooper puts it, this gothic scene is "as fearful as it was extraordinary" (340). In it, Mabel's feelings of terror and fright are not greater than those of Jennie who also hides herself in the blockhouse as the only way of escaping from certain death. Like Mabel, she experiences feelings of extreme fear and panic as soon as the island is attacked. Her deep worry and anxiety are obvious from the beginning of the assault when she runs to the blockhouse and quickly fastens its door leaving Mabel outside asking for admittance. In the scene, Jennie's terror reaches its peak when she becomes aware about the death of her husband and leaves her hiding place towards the spot where his body lays and where she is soon tomahawked by Arrowhead. The threats and dangers faced by Mabel and her companions after the invasion of the island justify the claim that the forest is used as "a symbol of fear" in *The Pathfinder* through which Cooper "Americanizes the Gothic techniques" (Kaftan 31). Like Brock den Brown, he adapts the gothic techniques to an American setting (Note 1).

In *The Pathfinder*, one of the main techniques that Cooper uses in his adaptation of the gothic to a distinctively American setting is suspense. In gothic literature, suspense is created mainly through the portrayal of perilous situations in which the lives of the main characters are threatened. In such situations, the characters feel petrified and their fate is usually obscure and uncertain. Cooper's recurrent use of suspense undoubtedly emphasizes the gothic aspects of the American wilderness. In *The Pathfinder*, suspense is so intense and breath taking that it is difficult to foretell the ensuing events or to predict the destiny of the characters. In the scene that describes the travellers' refuge in the artificial cover, for example, Cooper maintains gothic suspense to the last minute when the young Iroquois Indian enters the fugitives' hiding place and when Chingachgook immediately buries his tomahawk in his head. Even after the death of this Iroquois Indian, the fate of the travellers remains uncertain as their enemies soon discover the body of their fellow and start firing at them. Of all the fugitives, the fate of Leather stocking seems to be the most uncertain due to the fact that he was the last one to leave the shore of the Oswego and that his canoe is the most exposed to rifles of the enemy. Cooper underlines Leather stocking's perilous situation by claiming that the bullets more than once cut his garments without injuring him and that he seems to have a charmed life. At this moment of intense suspense, Leather stocking's survival becomes more and more uncertain as other Iroquois Indians join their friends on the bank of the river and keep firing at the fugitive. Gothic suspense is maintained until Leather stocking is able to hide himself behind a small rock that rose above the river and receives a canoe from his friends with which he reaches the western shore. Cooper keeps the suspense by depicting another perilous situation which is that of Chingachgook whose fate also seems to be obscure. Having been discovered by one of his enemy Indians, he is on the point of being shot from a short distance in the bushes. Suspense remains intense until Leather stocking successfully shoots his foe with his rifle commonly known as Killdeer.

Cooper's use of intense and breath taking suspense is evident in many other scenes in *The Pathfinder*. One of these scenes consists in Cooper's description of Chingachgook and Jasper's attempt to regain their lost canoe which is lodged on a shallow part of the rift during Leather stocking's escape from his enemies. Armed with knives and a tomahawk, Cooper states, Chingachgook and Jasper are compelled to swim across the river in the darkness of the night which is so deep and profound that nothing can be seen or discerned even in proximity to their place and that the search must be conducted through instinct rather than through the sense of sight. Cooper makes the scene full of suspense when the adventurers discover the presence of an Iroquois Indian moving in the water within reach of their arms. When this enemy Indian finds the canoe and seeks the help of Chingachgook and Jasper whom he does not recognize because of the deep darkness, the situation of the latter becomes critical and hazardous as they reluctantly follow their foe towards the eastern shore where the Iroquois wait his return. The scene becomes even more suspenseful when four other Iroquois Indians join their young friend and when the adventurers find themselves in the middle of their deadliest enemies. Once again, Chingachgook and Jasper's destiny is so uncertain that it is difficult for the reader to predict the ensuing events. Any attempt to escape the Iroquois Indians seems to be not only impracticable but also impossible due to the superior number and force of the enemy. Chingachgook's dexterity and ingenuity seem to be at fault and a gloomy fate seems to be inevitable. In the scene, the intensity of gothic suspense reaches its peak when the young Iroquois Indian is left alone with his foes and when a fierce and deadly battle erupts between him and Chingachgook after becoming aware about the presence of enemies in the water. Cooper delays revealing the outcome of this gothic scene by describing the manner in which Jasper secures the canoe and reaches his friends in the western shore. In this way, the fate of the two Indians remains uncertain and the suspense continues to be great. Leather stocking and his party are also unable to get any clues about the result of the strife due to the deep stillness of the river. It is not until Chingachgook emerges and reveals what has actually happened that suspense is finally put to an end. The scene that follows is no less suspenseful than the previous one. In it, Cooper describes the fugitives' passage through the Oswego rift and their miraculous escape from certain death. Suspense remains intense and the fate of the travellers continues to be uncertain until they become secure from every danger. In many ways, the numerous suspenseful scenes in *The Pathfinder* highlight the gothic aspects of the American wilderness and its atmosphere of terror and threat.

In *The Pathfinder*, the gothic dimension of the American wilderness is further emphasized by Cooper's use of the aesthetic category of the sublime in his descriptions of nature. In order to analyze this idea in Cooper's novel, a brief discussion of the meaning and origins of this aesthetic category is not only important but also necessary. The origin of considering the sublimity of nature as a gothic instrument can be traced to the works of many writers and philosophers such as Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. In his 1757 book *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke distinguishes between the sublime and the beautiful in nature and suggests that beauty might be defined in relation to smallness, smoothness, softness and delicacy whereas the sublime is related to vastness, infinity, magnificence, magnitude and obscurity.

Unlike the beautiful, the sublime has masculine rather than feminine characteristics. The difference between these two aesthetic categories is also related to the kind of feeling they produce in the beholder. While the beautiful produces feelings of pleasure and satisfaction, the sublime arouses feelings of fear, terror and pain. Burke suggests that the strongest emotion evoked by the sublime is astonishment. "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature," he states, "is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (39). When the passion of astonishment is created, he further states, the mind is entirely filled with its object and it can neither entertain any other nor reason on the object which employs it (39). For this reason, Burke argues that astonishment is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree and that the inferior effects are those of admiration, reverence and respect. Burke's distinction between the sublime and the beautiful is similar to that of Kant who developed Burke's ideas and aesthetic concepts. In his *Critique of Judgement*, Kant suggests that the beautiful in nature is found in objects having definite boundaries whereas the sublime is associated with formless and boundless objects (61). The most important distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, according to Kant, consists in the fact that beautiful objects are objects of satisfaction which seem to be pre adapted to human judgement whereas sublime objects are ones of apprehension which appear to contravene the ends of the power of judgement (61).

In *The Pathfinder*, Cooper's use of the aesthetic category of the sublime justifies the claim that his landscapes are gothic ones which are not only wild but also terrifying. From the beginning of the novel, for example, Cooper emphasizes the existence of the sublime in nature by claiming that "[t]he sublimity connected with vastness, is familiar to every eye" (7). The most abstruse and far-reaching of the poet's thoughts, he further states, crowd on the imagination as he gazes into the depths of the "illimitable void" (7). He suggests that the sublime creates feelings of fear, awe and admiration. In the opening of *The Pathfinder*, Cooper's use of the sublime is evident mainly through his description of the forest wilderness scene. Standing on a pile of uprooted trees that fell down because of a tempest that had raged in the forest, Mabel and her companions are in a position that perfectly enables them to gaze at the view that presents itself below them. Due to the fact that it is not only striking but also significant in the analysis of the gothic aspects of the American wilderness, a brief passage of Cooper's lengthy description of this view deserves to be quoted: and, truly, the scene was of a nature, deeply to impress the imagination of the beholder. Towards the west, in which direction the faces of the party were turned, and in which alone could much be seen, the eye ranged over an ocean of leaves, glorious and rich in the varied but lively verdure of a generous vegetation, and shaded by the luxuriant tints that belong to the forty second degree of latitude. It was the vastness of the view, the nearly unbroken surface of verdure that contained the principle of grandeur. The beauty was to be traced in the delicate tints, relieved by gradations of light and shadow, while the solemn repose, induced a feeling allied to awe. (8-9)

In his description of this "panoramic" (Morris 225) view of the forest wilderness, Cooper's emphasis on the sublimity and grandeur of the landscape is noticeable. In addition to its atmosphere of deep repose and solitude, the forest is also characterized by its vastness which mostly highlights its sublime

aspects. Cooper seems to suggest that the ocean does not in any way seem broader or vaster than the forest. His emphasis on the fact that nothing but a carpet or an ocean of leaves and foliage can be seen from the position of the spectators reflects his belief in the interminability and endlessness of such a forest view. The gothic aspect of the landscape is underlined mainly through Cooper's description of the feelings and emotions that it produces in the characters. Mabel, for example, evidently experiences feelings of fear, terror and astonishment when she looks at the immense forest which Cooper claims is a world in and by itself. She is so fascinated by the view that her soul seems to be in a state in which all its motions are suspended. Cooper underlines Mabel's feelings of deep fear and terror at the sight of this forest wilderness by claiming that her face "was beaming with the pensive expression, with which all deep emotions, even though they bring the most grateful pleasure, shadow the countenances of the ingenuous and thoughtful" (8). As Cooper's statement denotes, Mabel is not only pleased and satisfied but also terror-struck by the sight of this gothic and "Salvatorean" (Nevius 42) landscape (note 2).

The scenes in which Cooper portrays sublime and gothic natural landscapes are numerous in *The Pathfinder*. In the scene during which Mabel first looks at Lake Ontario from the top of a bastion of Fort Oswego, for example, the sublimity of the view is emphasized. As is the case with her reaction when she looks at the aforementioned forest wilderness, Mabel is described as experiencing feelings of dread, awe and astonishment at the sight of Lake Ontario whose "field of rolling waters" (108), Cooper claims, represented nothing less than a true panorama which is so fascinating and charming that the human eye cannot but fully appreciate its glory. In his description of this lake, Cooper underlines its sublimity mainly by highlighting its vastness and seeming interminability. From the top of the bastion on which Mabel stands, he argues, no land can be seen. To the north, east and west, the reign of the water is uncontested. In addition to vastness, the gothic aspects of Lake Ontario are evident through many other qualities and characteristics such as the tint of its waters. The color of its waters is neither glassy green nor deep blue as is the case with the ocean. Cooper claims that their color is that of a slightly amber hue which, despite its sophistication, does not affect the limpidity of the lake. Another quality that highlights the sublimity of Lake Ontario consists in the "hollow" (109) sounds that can often be heard near the shore of the lake where the waters roll into the caverns. In spite of their hollowness, however, Cooper states that these sounds do not affect the solemn solitude and repose of the lake. They only seem to emphasize its magnificence and grandeur. Cooper highlights the gothic aspect of the scene by claiming that Mabel seems to be "unconscious" during her gaze at the lake whose influence is "pervading both her body and her mind" (110). Mabel's repeated exclamations of surprise and admiration further denote her feelings of fear, terror and astonishment.

Native American savagery, hellishness and Spectrality

Cooper's focus on the Native Americans as purely American subjects in *The Pathfinder* underlines his use of distinctively native materials and his Americanization of the gothic. Due to his superficial knowledge of the Indians and of their native way of life, Cooper relied heavily on written materials for information about them. For instance, he resorted to the writings of John Heck

welder whose *Account of the History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations* directly inspired him in his portrayal of the Indian character (Weaver 74). For these reasons, his Indians are either excessively good or excessively bad. While the good Indians are portrayed as noble warriors whose honesty, justice and good morality make them seem to be perfect men, the bad Indians are described as "bloodthirsty" (Corbett 175) savages whose villainy and devilry make them seem as hellish figures. Despite the fact that the Indian tribes are numerous and have different cultures and traditions, Cooper identifies the good Indians as those who are allied with the British and the bad ones as those who are allied with the French. In *The Pathfinder* as well as in the other Leather Stocking Tales, the Mohicans and the Delawares represent the good Indians, whereas the Iroquois, Tuscaroras and the Hurons represent the bad ones. The latter Indians are portrayed as people who are inherently evil and whose malice seems to be gratuitous. Their cunning and ruthlessness make them seem like infernal agents whose main mission is to bring destruction upon their intended victims. They are also depicted as merciless savages and as inhuman barbarians who delight in drinking human blood. Their cruelty and brutality heighten the atmosphere of threat and danger of the American wilderness and make it seem even more horrifying. They also intensify the characters' feelings of fear and terror. These Indians might be considered as an American version of the specters, bleeding portraits and mysterious apparitions which are used in European gothic fiction. They further highlight Cooper's gothic literary style and his willingness to create an independent national literature.

In *The Pathfinder*, Arrowhead might be considered as the prototypical bad Indian who represents "Injin devilry" (75) and hellishness. From the beginning of the novel, he is portrayed as a cunning and "tricky" (Winchester 201) person whose villainy and treachery make him seem as a fiend. By pretending to be allied with the British army and working for major Duncan of Lundie, he seeks to execute his bloody intentions and to destroy his unsuspecting enemies in the cruellest manner. In fact, Arrowhead has long been secretly associated with the French and has attempted to conceal his disloyalty as far as possible from his foes. By guiding Mabel and her uncle through the wilderness, he evidently intends to mislead them and to make them his prisoners rather than showing them the path to Fort Oswego. His falseness is first noticeable in the scene of the artificial cover when Leather Stocking and his party are discovered by the Iroquois and when he suddenly deserts them and joins his fellow Indians on the eastern bank of the river. His unfaithfulness also becomes evident when he is captured and arrested by Jasper and Leather Stocking during their journey to the Thousand Islands on the Scud which he and his wife were following and watching its movements. The idea that he has been the means of discovering and betraying the position of Station Island to the French seems highly probable to Mabel. Although the Dew of June does not confirm this idea to Mabel, she admits that it was Arrowhead who led the Iroquois Indians in the attack of Station Island. It is mainly during this brutal assault that Arrowhead's savagery, barbarity and inhumanity are emphasized when he apathetically and cold-bloodedly brains Sandy's wife with his tomahawk and leaps forward like a demon coming from hell. In this scene, Cooper underlines his cruelty and ruthlessness by claiming that Jennie's "reeking hair was hanging at his girdle, as a trophy" (342). As is

obvious from Cooper's statement, Arrowhead is a bloodthirsty savage who does not even spare women and children. His foremost interest is to secure the scalps of his dead enemies regardless of their sex or age. For these reasons, Arrowhead might be considered as the archetypal gothic villain who does not seem to be a human-like figure.

The scene in which Cooper describes the Iroquois' brutal attack of Station Island is one of the key scenes that represent Native American savagery and hellishness in *The Pathfinder*. In this scene, Arrowhead's atrocity and inhumanity do not seem to be greater than those of his other fellow Indians. The cruelty and mercilessness of these natives of the American wilderness is described as being so intense that terror turns into horror in Cooper's novel. Commenting on the "horrible scene" (342), Cooper states that Jennie's appalling and thrilling yell at the discovery of her husband's dead body seems to be "melody to the cry that followed it so quickly as to blend the sounds" and to the "terrific war-whoop that arose out of the covers of the island" (342). Rushing out of their covers, these horrific Indians exultingly scalp the bodies of Corporal McNab and the three other soldiers whose bloody corpses make the scene even more shocking to Mabel. The view of this gruesome scene makes the latter so horror-struck that her blood seems to be frozen and her senses numbed. The savagery and heartlessness of the Iroquois Indians are heightened when they drink the liquor of the English and intend to burn the blockhouse with "hellish ingenuity" (355) in order to force Mabel to quit it and to surrender herself. These Indians, "whooping and leaping like demons" (354), are eager not only to secure Mabel's scalp but also to destroy the entire place and to announce their triumph over the English army. Despite the fact that Monsieur Sanglier, the French officer who commands the Indian warriors, had extinguished the fire before quitting Station Island and that the natives have neither flint nor steel, the Iroquois manage to light a fire by using a few dry leaves and a few light sticks with which they execute their devilish intentions. A white man would have abandoned the attempt to make fire in such a manner, Cooper states, but the ingenuity and ruthlessness of the savages is so great that they are able to carry out their evil deeds by means that are unknown to civilization. Mabel escapes from certain death thanks to the Dew of June who helps her to extinguish the fire and to put an end to the imminent danger. Cooper's recurrent reference to the Iroquois Indians as savages highlights his belief in their barbarity and inhumanity.

In the blockhouse scene, the devilry of the Indians is so horrifying that it becomes not only "shocking" (Long 116) but also disgusting. Cooper underlines the hellish ingenuity of the Native Americans by describing their attempt to deceive Sergeant Dunham and his party by restoring the island to its order and removing all signs of their abominable attack. Once again, Mabel's gothic fear turns into horror when she looks at the dead bodies of McNab and the three other soldiers near the blockhouse. Not only did the Indians remove all the blood stains from their faces but also they used many other artifices to distort their appearance and to make them look like living persons. This war ruse, which "in its gruesomeness could have been invented by an author of Gothic novels" (Tetley-Jones 65), is described in the following manner:

[T]heir limbs were stiffening in different attitudes intended to resemble life, at which the soul revolted. Still, horrible as these objects were to those near enough to discover the frightful

discrepancy between their assumed and their real characters, the arrangement had been made, with an art that would have deceived a negligent observer, at the distance of a hundred yards. After carefully examining the shores of the island, June pointed out to her companion, the fourth soldier seated with his feet hanging over the water, his back fastened to a sapling, and holding a fishing-rod in his hands. The scalplless heads were covered with their caps, and all appearance of blood had been carefully washed from each countenance. (362-63)

Cooper's description of the artifices used by the Iroquois Indians to trick their enemies highlights their savagery, immorality and wickedness which are so great that they are inconceivable. A white person would not think about using such barbaric ways to deceive his foes. As Mabel anguishly tells June, the cunning and treachery of the Indians exceed her thinking and imagination. The gruesomeness and ghastliness of the scene are further heightened through Cooper's portrayal of the way Jennie's body is distorted. The latter is described as standing in the door of a hut, wearing a cap on her scalplless head and holding a broom in one of her hands. Her mouth and jaws are also deformed in such a way that she seems to be laughing heartily while looking at the soldiers. Her laughter, however, is unnatural and horrible rather than natural and pleasant. It emphasizes the heartlessness and inhumanity of the Native Americans. Throughout the scene, Cooper evidently condemns rather than approves of the Indians' devilish actions and deeds in this scene. His disapprobation of these actions is articulated mainly through the character of Mabel who is described as totally disgusted and sickened by the sight of the dead bodies. She expresses her outrage and revulsion to June by telling her that she prefers to see the enemy than to look at the horrible contortions of the soldiers' corpses. Although June is satisfied and even boastful of the Indians' artifices because they help the Iroquois to ambush the English army and because they do no harm to the dead, Cooper suggests that the natives' actions and behavior are like the "revelries of demons" (364).

The Indians' cruelty and mercilessness are further emphasized in the scene which describes the return of Sergeant Dunham and his party from their sailing expedition. As soon as the soldiers quit the boats and enter the island, Cooper states, a heavy discharge of rifles is heard and "the war-whoop rang in all the surrounding thickets" (379). Inside the blockhouse, Leatherstocking and Mabel hear many wails and groans of pain near the boats. The latter's deep concern for the fate of her father intensifies her gothic fear and terror as her "heart beat so violently, that she was fearful its throbs would be heard" (372). Once again, Mabel's worst fears are materialized when she hears the voice of her father who is severely injured by a rifle bullet which passed through his body. In this gothic scene, Cooper states, all the soldiers are either injured or killed by the Indians' fire. The Sergeant's death by the end of the novel underlines the atrocity and barbarity of the Iroquois Indians. Their devilry is also emphasized when they attack the blockhouse in order to complete their victory over the English army. "At that instant," Cooper states, "the heavy report of a gun burst on the night, and the crash of rending wood was heard, as a heavy shot tore the logs in the room above, and the whole block shook with the force of a shell that lodged in the work" (397). The discharge of the howitzer makes the Indians' attack more brutal and dangerous. Leatherstocking narrowly escapes from certain death when it enters the blockhouse. The feelings of terror and horror produced by the discharge of this

missile are underlined through the character of Mabel who “could not repress a shriek, for she supposed all over her head, whether animate, or inanimate, destroyed. To increase her horror, her father shouted in a frantic voice to-‘Charge!’” (397). Mabel’s feelings of fear and dread highlight Cooper’s use of the gothic mode throughout the scene. When the Iroquois renew their “hellish job” (396) of building a fire against the logs of the blockhouse, the gothic atmosphere of the scene is heightened. In fact, this heartless and inhuman way of forcing Leatherstocking and his party to surrender highly endangers their lives.

By emphasizing the atrocity and mercilessness of the Iroquois Indians, Cooper suggests that the specters and mysterious apparitions used in European Gothic fiction are not more frightening and terrifying than the Native Americans. In fact, Cooper’s Indians themselves seem as spectral-looking figures in *The Pathfinder*. Their sudden and unexpected appearances and disappearances underline their “insubstantiality” (Bergland 87) and their resemblance to real ghosts and goblins. Their ability to materialize and to dematerialize in the American wilderness haunts Mabel and her companions. In the scene that describes the attack against Station Island, for example, the spectrality of Cooper’s Indians is noticeable. Although June warns Mabel about the upcoming attack, the latter is unable to discover any signs or symptoms of the enemy and of the proximity of danger. When the assault actually starts, it is carried out in a ghostly manner. Cooper states that the attack is “too sudden, too awful, and too unexpected” (338) that Mabel does not even cry or tremble. The ghostly apparition of the Indians is further underlined when Mabel hides herself in the blockhouse and when she carefully examines the island which seems to be entirely deserted. Cooper highlights the spectral appearance of the Indians by stating that

[t]o her great surprise, Mabel could not, at first, see a living soul on the island, friend or enemy. Neither Frenchman, nor Indian was visible, though a small straggling white cloud that was floating before the wind, told her in which quarter, she ought to look for them. The rifles had been discharged from the direction of the island whence June had come, though whether the enemy were on that island, or had actually landed on her own, Mabel could not say. Going to the loop that commanded a view of the spot, where McNab lay, her blood curdled at perceiving all three of his soldiers lying apparently lifeless at his side. These men had rushed to a common centre, at the first alarm, and had been shot down almost simultaneously, by the invisible foe, whom the corporal had affected to despise . . . In short, the island lay in the quiet of the grave. (340)

The invisibility of the Iroquois Indians on the island justifies the claim that they are portrayed as spectral looking figures in Cooper’s novel. To Mabel, they appear as insubstantial beings whose unexpected apparition makes them seem like goblins. The stillness and quietness of the place emphasize their ghostly appearance and intensify the gothic aspect of the scene. Even when they suddenly materialize on the island, they look like unearthly and otherworldly beings exulting at the fall of Christian men. The frightening shrieks and yells they utter during the night make their apparition even more mysterious. Their materialization on the island, however, does not last for a long time. After their use of the aforementioned artifices to deceive their enemies, they quickly dematerialize and the island once again lays in the stillness of the grave. Despite her fastidious

examination of the entire place, Mabel does not detect any signs of their presence. They seem to have strangely and mysteriously vanished from the island. When the Sergeant and his party come back from their expedition, the emergence of the Indians also seems like a ghostly apparition. In fact, none of the soldiers is aware of the presence of enemy Indians in the post. After their brutal assault and their unsuccessful attempt to burn the blockhouse, the Indians vanish again and do not appear until the return of Jasper and his party. These sudden and unexpected materializations and dematerializations of the Indians are evident throughout the novel. They make them as frightening as the ghosts of European Gothic fiction.

Conclusion

Despite the absence of conventional gothic elements and techniques, *The Pathfinder* might be considered as a gothic novel in which Cooper uses distinctively American settings and materials. Cooper’s adaptation of the gothic mode to the American environment is noticeable mainly through his substitution of the American wilderness for the traditional castle which is usually used in European gothic fiction. Throughout the novel, the American wilderness is described as a gothic setting which is full of threats and dangers. Its insecurity and uncertainty make the characters experience feelings of intense fear and terror. Mabel Dunham and her uncle Charles Cap, for instance, become the victims of gothic fear during numerous scenes such as the one in which they hide themselves in an artificial cover in order to escape from certain death or captivity. Cooper’s use of suspense in his descriptions of the precarious situation of the characters emphasizes the gothic aspects of the American wilderness and its atmosphere of threat and danger. In *The Pathfinder*, suspense is so intense and breathtaking that it is difficult to predict the ensuing events and the fate of the characters. The feelings of terror and fright are also produced by the sublime and gothic landscapes that Cooper draws in the novel. In fact, Cooper’s natural landscapes are so wild and terrifying that they provide a dreadful backdrop to the actions and events of the narrative. In his adaptation of the gothic elements and techniques to an American setting, Cooper also substitutes the Native Americans for the ghosts, specters and mysterious apparitions which are used in European gothic fiction. Cooper’s bad Indians are characterized by their savagery, brutality and hellishness. They heighten the gothic mood of the novel and the characters’ feelings of insecurity and threat. Arrowhead might be considered as the prototypical gothic villain in *The Pathfinder* due to his cruelty and mercilessness which make him seem as a fiend. The other Iroquois Indians are also portrayed as hellish figures whose foremost interest is to scalp their enemies. The savagery and barbarity of these Indians is evident mainly in the blockhouse scene in which terror turns into horror due to the gruesomeness and ghastliness of the situation. These Indians are also depicted as spectral-looking figures whose sudden and unexpected appearances and disappearances make them seem like frightful ghosts. By using native elements and materials, Cooper transforms the gothic mode and contributes to the creation of an independent national literature.

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