James Fenimore Cooper Essay, Research Paper

James Fenimore Cooper was born in Burlington, New Jersey

on September 15, 1789. He was the eleventh of twelve children born to

William and Elizabeth Cooper. When James was one year old the family

moved to the frontier, and his father established the settlement of

Cooperstown at the head of the Susquehanna River.

Cooper attended a private preparatory school in Albany, New York,

and was then admitted to Yale in 1803. He was expelled during his junior

year because of a prank. His family allowed him to join the navy as a

midshipman, but he soon found that more discipline was present in the Navy

than at Yale. In 1810 Cooper took a furlough, and never returned to active

duty.

Cooper married Susan De Lancy in 1811, and for the next ten years he

led the life of a country gentleman. However, after the death of all five of his

elder brothers he became responsible for supporting their widows and paying

their debts. Added to this was the fact that his father’s estate had not been

worth as much as originally thought.

In 1820 Cooper published his first fiction, Precaution, on a challenge

from his wife and it was not successful. Then in 1821 he published his

second novel book, The Spy which had brought international fame and a

certain amount of wealth to Cooper.

Cooper’s third book, The Pioneers, was the first of five novels that

made up the Leatherstocking Tales. These were immensely popular frontier

novels featuring a frontiersman by the name of Natty Bumpo, or Hawkeye.

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The Pioneers is generally considered to be the first truly American

novel. The five novels of the series were not written in their narrative order,

and were produced over a period of eighteen years.

Cooper and his wife had five children, and they lived in Europe from

1826 until 1833 for the education of their children. When Cooper returned to

America in 1833 he found he as rather unpopular due to works he had written

while living in Europe, namely Notions of the Americans and Letter to

General Lafayette. He left New York City because of this unpopularity, and

went to live in Cooperstown, New York, the settlement founded by his father.

Cooper died at Cooperstown on September 14, 1851, one day before

his sixty-second birthday. Cooper has, and continues to be, an immensely

popular writer, and he is generally considered to be the first major American

novelist.

The Pioneers were successful in Cooper’s time because of its verbal

pictures “excited a sensation among the artists, altogether unprecedented in

the history of our domestic literature” and helped establish the style of the

Hudson River School, our first group of landscape painters. Translated early

into all the major languages of Europe, The Pioneers was one of the first

American novels to carry distinctive, authoritative American experience to the

world.

In the community of Templeton there were community leaders. These

leaders were, Judge Temple, Hiram Doolittle, Natty Bumpo, Billy Kirby,

Sheriff Richard Jones and Judge Marmaduke Temple.

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Natty Bumpo becomes the self-appointed conscience of the community

in general and of Judge Temple in particular, constantly criticizing the “wasty

ways” of the settlers. Natty Bumpo is the most aware and concerned

individual for the community.

The greater message of The Pioneers is Cooper stressing the constant

abuse of the environment of settlers in his time period. Settling of the land

entailed rampant destruction of nature. Natty Bumpo is appalled at how the

Cooperstown area pioneers are so wasteful of nature.

Natty Bumpo observed many abuses of the wildlife around him. He

sees tens of thousands of passenger pigeons killed, for more than can be

eaten, and the killing are justified as saving the wheat crops, which are not

even the pigeons main food source.

He sees settlers like Richard Jones who cuts to large of holes for sap in

maple trees which eventually kills the trees. When the trees begin to die he

cuts the trees down for fire wood with out a second thought. He doesn’t even

consider the resource he is depleting.

Judge Temple does realize the destruction that is taking place but out

of pure hypocrisy refuses to do anything because of land scheme activities.

Although Bumpo is against the depletion of wildlife and natural

resources, he also gets caught up in the excitement of the hunt, when he and

Oliver Edwards and Chingachgook kill a deer out of season and Bumpo is

later punished for it.

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In this book politics plays a part. The judge does not like Bumpo and

has had it out for him. It is safe to say local politics definitely dominated in

this time period. States rights was the prominent theme and the federal

government was something that most people did not have everyday contact

with so they could not directly relate to. Therefore the daily encounter with

local officials made the local government have a much greater impact on the

everyday lives of the average town’s person.

In my opinion this book was written by a man who loved nature and

the wonderful world of the frontier. Not only was this book a story of Natty

Bumpo it was a handbook to warn people to respect the world around you

and conserve nature. Once the animals and countryside of our beautiful

country is gone it will be lost forever.