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ENGLISH

Teaching History through *The Last of the Mohicans*

Teaching Historical Events and Historical Gender Norms
through Literature by utilizing James Fenimore Cooper's
The Last of the Mohicans

Zaher el-Shami

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Supervisor:

Ronald Paul

Examiner:

Margrét Gunnarsdottir

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Author: Zaher el-Shami

Supervisor: Ronald Paul

Abstract:

This essay explores how effective literature can be when used to teach history utilizing James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, in order to teach students two specific historical events, as well as historical gender roles and norms. It does this by first looking at how literature has been employed by others to teach history with pedagogical goals in mind, followed by examining gender roles from the period the novel has as its setting, including the period the novel itself was written in. These aspects are then examined through a didactic and literary examination of some of the novel's main themes and passages, ones that would be most suited for teaching historical elements the novel contains to students attending an intermediary level of upper secondary education. Ultimately, *The Last of the Mohicans* proves to be an excellent tool in teaching students various historical elements, with the potential to even complicate the content of the lessons by extending the scope of the literary examination, should a skilled teacher so choose.

Keywords: Literature, History, James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, Gender, Historical Events, Native Americans, Colonialism, Fort William Henry, Massacre, Seven Years' War.

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1. Introduction

The Swedish National Curriculum for English in upper secondary schools prescribes guidelines for education, that among many stipulations includes students' development in understanding living conditions, cultural, and social concepts of different parts of the world where English is used as a primary language (Skolverket 2011: 2). It adds that teaching shall also contribute to stimulating students' curiosity regarding language and culture.

Additionally, the Education Act (SFS 2010: 800) along with the Swedish curriculums (Skolverket 2011a and 2011b) prescribes the need for instilling the values of equality and democracy in students, as they are key ingredients which shape the national educational framework. Curriculums for the upper secondary school, the charter which this essay will emphasize throughout, stresses that schools need to promote an understanding of others, specifying that: "No one should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief system..." (Skolverket 2011a: 11, Skolverket 2011b: 9). It adds that because of the increasing effects of globalization, "the ability of people to live with and appreciate the values inherent in cultural diversity" is a key goal of the education system, concluding that "Schools must help students to develop an identity that can be related to and encompass not only what is specifically Swedish, but also that which is Nordic, European, and ultimately global." (Skolverket 2011a: 11)

What the curriculums do not prescribe however, is how teachers should proceed in fulfilling these directives, as the discretion to do so is left entirely to the teachers implementing them. This gives educators free reign in choosing the best possible ways of achieving the above requirements. The pedagogy that this essay is based on stems from the teaching of history, wherein there are several central reasons as to why history should be taught; the primary one driving this essay being the one that satisfies the above outlined criteria. In other words, the impetus for teaching history in this case can be attributed to the theory that history is taught not only for the individual to better understand the present, but also for the individual to critically examine their own reality and living conditions in relation to historical concepts and context.

To accomplish that in the English classroom, I have chosen literature as the driving vehicle for this endeavor, in order to teach history and achieve the above goals through usage of literature. In doing so, many of the primary requirements in the Swedish National Curriculum are

also to be satisfied of course, namely helping students improve and perfect their reception and production of the English language.

The text that I have chosen to achieve the above goals is James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* published in 1826, along with the adaptation of the film version from 1992 carrying the same title. The novel is both famous as well as infamous for its content, and has been termed as one of the "most popular novels in English" ever since it was published, as well as being one of the most "widely read in American literature courses" (Manning & Wyatt, 2011: 75-76). The novel is a fictionalized adventure tale set against a historical backdrop of the Siege of Fort William Henry in 1757 during The Seven Years' war between the English and the French, the war itself taking place between the years 1756 and 1763. The novel deals with historical record directly by inserting the fictional adventure of the main characters within the authentic historical events, as well as having them interact with real historical figures. Additionally, many themes regarding gender and race permeate the novel, which we could view today as historical portrayals and evolutionary predecessors of the norms concerning gender and race relations we engage in today.

My motivation for selecting this novel above other, arguably more accessible ones stems from several factors. While true that picking a text published closer to the student's own time period would help with their ability to understand and identify with the story, it would also reduce the mental leap they would have to perform in order to understand the story and the characters. One of the primary pedagogical goals in this essay is to introduce foreign cultures and peoples to students, and make them palpable and as three dimensional as possible. Another reason is the complexity of the language Cooper's novel offers. As the language in the text is dated, it offers a challenge to students that are already supposed to be attending an intermediary course. The language in the novel is also overly descriptive almost to the point where it is detrimental to the novel, yet offers students of the text a vocabulary that can seldom be found elsewhere. Additionally, the thematic content of the novel is rather straightforward. Although the novel may be tough to get through for the above reasons, its story is largely uncomplicated and can be very easy to follow. One does not find the combination of the two often focalized in a singular text, making this particular novel somewhat of a rare occurrence. Finally, it is not often that a written work receives a worthy depiction in other media, such as films in this case, where the latter builds on and complicates the former in enriching ways. It is my belief pedagogy should

strive to fire on all cylinders, and combining as many different types of media has the potential to create the impact one desires, as will be explored later in this essay.

The function of this essay will be to demonstrate how *The Last of the Mohicans*, can teach historical events through literature. However, it will also showcase how it can teach historical norms and values of the period it is set in apropos gender, including gendered racial depictions, and whether or not those bear historical authenticity in a novel that attempts to balance fiction and historical facts.

The first chapter of this essay will argue for using literature in teaching history, as well as choosing to use literature to teach English. The second chapter will introduce studies of historical gender norms pertinent to the relevant time period, and historical records that illuminate the manner in which American society performed gender roles both during the time of the Seven Years' War when the novel takes place, as well as during the period the novel had been written in. Chapter three will contain a didactic examination of *The Last of the Mohicans* from the perspective of focusing on historical events, as well as an examination of historical gender norms within the novel. Additionally compounding the two, the pedagogical value of utilizing the filmed version in the classroom will be explored, offering practical examples to use and focus on in the language classroom. Finally, the fourth chapter will contain an analysis of the project, as well as concluding reflections.

1.1. *The Last of the Mohicans* in the Language Classroom

Following the introduction, this chapter will introduce the argument and benefits of using literature when teaching English, as well as introduce both the novel and film versions of *The Last of the Mohicans*. It describes how they differ from one another, and why that is important when using one to illuminate the differences in the other with regard to historical accuracy, as well as historical gender performances of the characters. It will also examine some of the literary criticism levied against the novel.

1.2. Using Literature in the English Language Classroom

In the light of insights into the reading process and into how successful readers interact with texts, a set of general learning goals for the reading component of an English language course could include:

- to be able to read a range of texts in English
- to adapt reading style according to range of purposes and apply different strategies (e.g. skimming, scanning) as appropriate
- to build a knowledge of language (e.g. vocabulary, structure), which will facilitate development of greater reading ability
- to build schematic knowledge in order to interpret texts meaningfully
- to develop awareness of the structure of written texts in English and to be able to make use of e.g., rhetorical structure, discourse features and cohesive devices in comprehending texts
- to take a critical stance to the content of texts. (Hedge 2000: 205)

In the above passage, Tricia Hedge establishes goals for the reading classroom by demonstrating some of the implications for the teaching of English reading to students. These are the goals this essay will attempt to achieve through teaching *The Last of the Mohicans* to an upper secondary class at the English 6 level. These goals coincide specifically with the general prescriptions of the Swedish syllabus for the upper secondary level, which distinguishes between the four main skills in learning a language: listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Skolverket 2011c). While reading may help learners to master all four of the skills in learning the English language, the two particular skills of reading and writing are helped greatly by reading literature, given that they are authentic texts that can help the learner increase and master the utilization and understanding of words within specific contexts (Hedge 2000: 204).

Additionally, Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater note that:

... literature provides a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable. Reading a substantial and contextualized body of text, students gain familiarity with many features of the written language – the formation and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas – which broaden and enrich their own writing skills. (Collie & Slater, 2009: 5)

They also add that literature as a form of writing is by definition an authentic text because it has not been specifically tailored for learners, unlike textbooks and reading materials specifically extracted for the purposes of catering to any given learners' level (Collie & Slater, 2009: 3). These sentiments echo the ones I have advocated for above, namely that literature is an integral component in fostering specific language skills in learners, but also coincides with the goals of the national curriculum in the sense that literature provides contextual and cultural information as well. This information can be used to broaden the horizons of students by having them experience and understand the cultures and norms of a country where the primary language being

spoken is English, not to mention granting students the ability to go back in time and examine the particular country in question within a specific historical period by utilizing the text.

1.3. Why teach *The Last of the Mohicans* in order to Teach History through Literature?

The term *historical novel* has a few different applications, and can refer to a few different types of novels and subgenres, such as *Historical Fiction* or *Historical Romance*. Historical novels in general are set in the past; evoking the conditions of the period, wherein historical figures can feature as minor or major characters (“Historical Novel”). James Fenimore Cooper’s contemporaries in the field, from countries like Britain and France were Sir Walter Scott, the author of *Ivanhoe* (1820), *Weaverly* (1814), and *Rob Roy* (1817), Victor Hugo, who wrote *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831), and Balzac. All of the above are novels set in a particular time in history, blending historical characters and settings with fictional ones.

Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* is the second book in a series that is part of a pentalogy termed *The Leatherstocking Tales*. In order to orientate the reader with the novel’s contents and characters, a short summary follows: The novel’s protagonist is *Hawkeye/Natty Bumppo*, a frontiersman born to white parents that were killed when he was young, ultimately leading to him being raised by the Delaware Indians. He, along with his two friends *Chingachgook* and his son *Uncas*, happen upon half-sisters *Cora* and *Alice Munro* in the forest near Lake Horicon, as they are escorted by a British Army Major *Duncan Heyward*, along with a division of soldiers en route to reinforce Fort William Henry. The party is led by the Huron *Magua*, leading them into a trap to be slaughtered. As the protagonist and his friends reach the party, they prevent the killing of *Cora*, *Alice*, and *Duncan*, and escort them to Fort William Henry, where they are greeted by the sisters’ father *Colonel Munro*, in charge of the garrison at the fort. The party arrives to the fort as it is being besieged by *General Montcalm* and his troops. Failing to defend the fort, *Colonel Munro* surrenders to *Montcalm*, and *Montcalm* allows the entire garrison and the aforementioned fictional characters to leave the fort and march back to the British side. *Magua*, having allied himself with *Montcalm* earlier given the Huron tribe was allied with the French, leads his Huron warriors to massacre the remnants of the British garrison retreating through the woods. *Alice* and *Cora* are kidnapped by *Magua* in the ensuing chaos, and

their father, *Hawkeye*, *Chingachgook* and *Uncas* set off on a quest to rescue them. The adventure ultimately culminates in *Uncas* attempting to rescue *Cora*, both of whom end up being killed by *Magua*. *Magua* is the last to die by the protagonist *Hawkeye*'s hand.

On the whole, *The Last of the Mohicans* is an unadulterated adventure story, with heroes attempting to chase down a dastardly villain with a penchant for kidnapping, a chase that culminates in varying degrees of success and failure for the protagonists. What set the novel apart from many other novels featuring a similar kind of an adventure story are its historical backdrop and its characters. *Colonel Munro* is actually based on the historical figure Colonel Monro, a garrison leader at the genuine Fort William Henry, which was besieged by another historical figure General Luis-Joseph de Montcalm, in the year the novel takes place. Furthermore, the Massacre at Fort William Henry was equally a genuine historical event that took place after Monro's surrender to Montcalm.

Along with the events and persons based in history, so too are the "Indians" in the book, namely the "Mohicans", Huron and other tribes, which held allegiance with General Montcalm and the French, as they fought the British for the control of the colonies. While the actual characterization of the characters in the novel is mostly fiction, the Siege of Fort William Henry and the ensuing Massacre, as well as the commanding officers depicted are actual historical figures. However, since their depiction is fictionalized, there is nothing separating historical fiction with historical fact. This is where teaching history through literature in the English classroom has a chance to stand out by not only examining the historical record when contrasted with the novel, but also examining Cooper's novel and the way it is told; trying to critically examine the characters and their fates as the novel draws to a close, and what that analysis might tell us concerning people that populated that time period.

With that in mind, the novel becomes a fertile area for exploring the history of the period and the people in it. It has the capability to turn students into proverbial detectives, separating the wheat from chaff as it were, determining the difference between history and fiction. Afterwards, they have the opportunity to examine why the fictional elements were written by Cooper in the manner that they were, and why the history within the novel differs from the history we have the opportunity to read today regarding the two events. Students can also examine the relationships between the characters, and are provided with the opportunity to critically analyze the gender and racial stereotypes the story portrays, contrasting them with current gender norms.

Furthermore, as the film *The Last of the Mohicans* from 1992 by Michael Mann does not follow the story set within the novel entirely faithfully, it acts as a response to the novel that has the potential to illuminate and complicate for students how and why certain aspects of the story were changed by the director, and for which reasons. Michael Mann, the director of the 1992 film clearly expressed, in a retrospective interview he gave twenty years after filming the motion picture, the intent behind approaching the adaptation of the novel along with his views on it. He also delved into the attention to detail the cast and crew put into depicting the authentic historical events and cultures of the time period.

Commenting on Cooper's novel, Mann (2012) outright declared he did not consider the novel to be a good one, as he viewed it through the historical facts that related to the author. Mann sees the novel as nothing more than a literary justification for taking of the land that belonged to Native Americans, as Fenimore Cooper's father titled the land the novel takes place in Cooperstown, and had real-estate holdings there in 1820. The novel's conclusion can be seen to imply that European Americans would be much better stewards of the lands and riches the Native Americans had is one element which justifies that conclusion, according to Mann (2012).

Regarding their attempts to depict the period and the peoples as authentic as possible, Mann (2012) explicated that all of the Native Americans in the film appear correctly in concord with the time period depicted, because they all descend from the Iroquois tribes. The endeavor of making the film, he (Mann, 2012) described as becoming a deep emotional experience for the cast because they could identify with their own personal history once their culture had been recreated for the shooting of the film. Mann (2012) also remarked that the film attempted to portray Native Americans as complex individuals, something that one does not get a sense of from Cooper's novel. He references Chief Joseph Grant, a Native American that travelled to Europe three times during his lifetime, gaining significant insight into cultures he was not apart from by birth. Mann (2012) describes the Six Nation Iroquois as sophisticated, and a force to be reckoned with at the time as well. Ultimately, the focus of the movie was not so much the Anglo-Americans and their agenda, but the wants and needs of the indigenous peoples as well.

Mann essentially tangents some of the more prominent literary criticism levied against Cooper's novel. Primary of these is echoed by Mark Riley Cardwell, who states:

“The inexcusable crime of the novel, aside from its racial stereotyping, is that it naturalizes both the concept of segregation between Natives and settlers, and, crucially, the idea that the

‘time of the red-men’ has come and gone, urging the reader to think of Natives as relics of an earlier age.” (Cardwell, 2010)

Cardwell however also notes (2010) that the stereotyping the novel exhibits runs both ways, sometimes exalting one set of characters, but then denigrating another for the purpose of Cooper managing to drive his racist point to its conclusion.

Stephen Railton, the professor of American Literature at the University of Virginia also makes note of this racialised element, adding that beyond straightforward literary criticism, novels like Robert Montgomery Bird’s *Nick of the Woods* as well as Mark Twain’s *Roughing It* were intentionally designed as a literary reply and counterpoint to Cooper’s novel, in which both emphasize a racialised view of Native Americans as ignorant, savage, violent, and brutal (Cooper, 1998: 9). Railton however defends Cooper’s novel to an extent with regard to the apologist attitude toward the extermination of Native Americans, stating that the story in *The Last of the Mohicans* has to be viewed in context with the other four novels making up the pentalogy, and the racial conflict the main character experiences throughout the entirety of the story. Both challenging and affirming the American displacement of Native Americans (Cooper, 1998: 12).

Additionally, Railton introduces other views of the novel taken directly from either reviews of it or literary criticism of later generations, excerpting W.H. Gardiner’s and Mark Twain’s criticisms of Cooper’s verbosity, as well as weakness of his narrative arcs (Cooper, 1998: 461). Ultimately, much of the literary criticism levied against *The Last of the Mohicans* deals with the raw linguistic content, as well as focusing on the racialised aspect of Cooper’s representations of Native Americans and Anglo-Americans. Largely absent are any literary criticisms dealing with the portrayal of gender, other than ones examined by Railton for the purposes of investigating how the racialised elements are portrayed in the novel (Cooper, 1998: 15). Even though this essay treats the issue of gender as a secondary consideration subordinated to the inspection of historical elements within the novel, one can argue that examining gender relations and norms in Cooper’s novel is the primary aspect that makes the literary experience a worthwhile endeavor, as well as an enjoyable one.

All of the above elements combined together make *The Last of the Mohicans* a novel that has the opportunity to teach the referenced syllabus requirements, as well as history through an authentic piece of literature. Cooper’s novel can thus be of significant use to those who would wish to teach history regarding events, culture, societies, social, gender, and racial norms. Additionally, it can impart and expose students to historical and visceral language that differs

from the language in which literature is written today. The 1992 film can be used as a contemporary response to the novel written in 1826, as it highlights and even alters the history portrayed in the novel. Therefore, it can function as a tool in critically examining the novel.

Because the language and the themes in the novel are as complex as they are, along with the subject requiring a degree of maturity from the students in order for them to penetrate the themes properly, this novel is best suited for students in upper secondary education, learning English 6 or English 7. This essay will direct its contents towards upper secondary students studying English 6.

1.4. Potential Difficulties with the Material

Out of the many people who have analyzed the text, perhaps one voice on the matter distinguishes itself more than others, and that is Mark Twain's own critical essay of Cooper's novels, titled *Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses*, published in 1895. In it, he criticizes Cooper's use of literary elements that repeat themselves, and has general criticisms towards the content, however his main gripes with Cooper were that his writings lacked varieties in style, as well as being generally wordy, overdrawn, and unnecessarily long (Gutjahr, 2009: p. 447).

These remarks are hard to contradict, as *The Last of the Mohicans* can be seen as overly descriptive at times, along with being arduously protracted. While Cooper's lengthy descriptions help paint a vivid picture of the environment that is based in actual historical locations near Lake Horicon, and what was Cooperstown at the time of Cooper's writing the novel, the book can certainly be considered a behemoth even for an expert literary enthusiast. It is for this reason I will not be using the whole book in the classroom, but will subjectively choose thematically significant chapters to be read by students. These will be ones that primarily contain information related to the teaching goals, as opposed to simple descriptions of the woodland or physical adventures the characters find themselves going through. While those will feature in the selected chapters somewhat, the material to focus on will be such that contains interpersonal interactions between the characters, as well as important plot points driving the story forward. These materials include the chapters detailing the fictionalized historical events most prominently as the primary selection criteria.

Another problematic aspect of using a novel like this is that the students might become confused with what fiction and fact actually are while reading the book, and thus conflate the

two, or misinterpret them. Though, being that this is in fact the objective of teaching the book, most of the considerations required for dealing with this problem are featured in the materials to be used while teaching this novel, and they will be outlined in the later chapters.

2. Theory

This chapter will detail the theoretical impetus for using literature to teach history, as well as outline historical gender norms concerning the time period roughly related to the geographical location the novel takes place in.

2.1. Teaching History through Literature

An interesting conclusion on teaching history through literature has been posited in an article by Rea Berg (2014), where before tackling the issue head on, she examines how history has been taught before any standardized practices existed, and why one would use literature in order to teach history at all. She comes to the conclusion that history in the United States had primarily been taught for the purposes of getting students from different immigrant backgrounds to learn a unified history, which ended up becoming the birth of the history textbooks comprised of dates and events significant to the authors, and deemed arbitrarily significant for the students.

Thus, teaching history through literature according to Berg (2014) is a return to the root of historical education, because the people who studied history originally in order to write textbooks when compulsory education began, in fact, read literature as their sources. Neil Postman wrote in his book *The End of Education* (1995: 50), that in teaching history, educators should be urged not to utilize textbooks because they are “the enemies of education, instruments for promoting dogmatism and trivial learning”. Additionally, the historian David McCullough noted that telling stories is the most effective way of learning history, stating:

If I say to you the king died and then the queen died, that’s a sequence of events. If I say the king died and the queen died of grief, that’s a story. That’s human. That calls for empathy on the part of the teller of the story and . . . the listener to the story. (McCullough, 2005)

These sentiments are echoed by a multitude of educators and researchers alike, as Michelle Griep points out in her article *Fact or Fiction: Teaching History with Literature*, noting that:

Three major studies (Levstik 1986, VanSledright 1995, VanSledright & Kelly 1996) all concluded that a students' interest and their ability to learn and retain information measurably increased when literature was used. Textbooks are what their name implies, namely text that's been condensed and stripped of life and color. Translated: boring. (Griep, 2006)

At U.C. Berkley, a series of teacher institutes were run by Michele Delattre and Erik Sahlin from 1998 to 2000 with themes related to teaching pre-modern history through literature. Other than providing background materials for other teachers to use in order to teach history through literature, they also encourage teachers to use art and performance when teachers are to create assignments or lessons, aside from just using written material.

Teaching history by utilizing literature is certainly not a revolutionary concept, and the OAH Magazine of History contains an article by David Kelly (1999: 27) dealing with publications that recommend specific historical novels to use in order to teach history, such as *Teaching with Historical Novels* by John A. Smith and Dorothy Dobson, as well as *Teaching American History through the Novel* by Sharon Bannister and Twyla R. Wells.

Moving to the realm of why teaching history is important, the Swedish historian Peter Aronsson denotes three key reasons: seeking a sense of meaning, explaining change, or legitimizing specific actions taken in the present (Aronsson, 2004: 57). Relating to the goals of this essay, the rationale for teaching *The Last of the Mohicans* certainly falls into the realm of educating students about facets of different cultures, especially cultures that not only differ in space, but also time. This would approximate closely to seeking a sense of meaning to events and actions committed by others, according to Aronsson's theory (2004: 57). However, another key aspect for using this novel is to utilize Aronsson's second reasoning for teaching history; explaining change in gender norms and customs to students from a past era, wherein they gain the opportunity to compare them to contemporary ones that they can relate to, ultimately leading them to perform a critical analysis of their own gender attitudes and values.

In conclusion, there is a significant quantity of materials establishing precedent in utilizing literature to teach history, as well as teachers possessing an array of diverse aims in utilizing literature to accomplish their educational goals.

2.2. Historicizing Gender Norms

Before delving into the issues of historical gender identification, norms, and relations, it is useful to point out what gender is, and why it is important in the first place. Judith Butler (1999: xxviii)

describes gender as being something we perform, as opposed to something that we intrinsically already are. She sees gender as a *cultural performance*, something that the individual consciously or unconsciously decides to perform and emulate at all times (Butler, 1999, xxvix). This unceasing performance makes it appear as if constant performance of one's gender identity is something that is completely natural, and Butler (1999) designates this as *gender performativity*.

Following from that, if we accept that gender is performed constantly, that means it is not fixed, and thus can be changed by the individual's will. This however is difficult to achieve, because the constant performance of genders creates norms that appear natural and fixed, hence, any deviation from the norm is seen as abnormal, and often wrong. However, by historicizing genders and norms, we can observe that social behavioral patterns change, as do the roles the genders perform. Meaning, the gender roles we have today are different from the ones that were performed two hundred years ago. Today, we are also aware of the fact that societies in different geographical locations and cultures have different gender roles depending on the sex of the individual, but we will focus on specific historical examples here, as they are the ones that primarily relate to the scope of this essay.

In *Girls, Boys, and Emotions*, Peter Stearns (1993: 3) argues that *emotional cultures* change with time, and where once expressing certain emotions was seen as positive, after a significant amount of time passes, expressing the same emotions may be regarded as negative. Dealing with the time period concerning the one James Fenimore Cooper resided in when he wrote *The Last of the Mohicans*, Stearns notes:

Emotional cultures normally have a pronounced gender component. That is, prescriptive materials -sermons, advice books, even rituals when they can be interpreted-convey a set of ideals regarding emotion that are adjusted for the specific roles and identities deemed suitable for men and for women. Several changes in American emotional culture, including the twentieth-century banishment of anger, involved significant redefinitions of the associated gender attributes as well. Analysis and explanation of these changes, which marked the transition between Victorian and twentieth-century norms, raise significant issues about other aspects of gender relationship. Popular advice givers in the Victorian decades, from the 1850s until after 1900, urged males and females to prepare for distinct gender roles from childhood onward by accepting equally distinct emotional norm. (Stearns, 1993: 37)

Stearns (1999: 38) goes on to describe that culture within that society was reconstructed in order to primarily serve the needs of the workplace, ones that would employ both men and women of differing backgrounds. Prior to that however, the Victorian ideal that distinctly differentiated

between men and women served as a model for families, and in this system, “boys were urged to utilize aggressiveness to prepare for their roles as family providers” (Stearns, 1999: 39).

Stearns (1999: 6) remarks that Victorian culture, especially the emotional aspect of it, evolved from earlier American understandings of men and women as both worthy of existence yet unequal. He adds (1999: 6) that this type of outlook became the central core of the United States society, as marked inequalities between men and women increased and continued in the eighteenth century. Men were associated with reason, while women were associated with sentimentality, yet there was an absence in ranking the two, along with judging which of the two took precedence due to the need for the two to collaborate, and share responsibilities as well as rewards (Stearns, 1999: 7).

Ultimately, these kinds of roles were perpetuated in different kinds of literary examples and handbooks where boys were shown to overcome fear and control their anger. While being fearful and emotional was not prescribed to women, Stearns (1999: 13-14) remarks that fearful mothers, at that time moral bedrocks within the culture, were criticized being such while it was assumed fathers did not engage in emoting fear. Finally, he adds (1999: 15) that these gender differentiations were explored and perpetuated in prescriptive types of literature, as writers popularized them in books. Men who were not courageous were termed as *sissies* and were ridiculed for not living up to masculine gender standards. Conversely, the *sissy* neologism came from the word *sister*, something that itself references which gender this set of qualities was identified with.

Referenced by Toby L. Ditz (2004: 12), in the essay *Household Governance*, Carole Shammas writes that in the American regions under the control of Anglo-Americans, most of the people in households were considered dependents and subordinated to the head of a household. Once boys reached the status of adults, they pursued becoming heads of households, holding authority as husbands, fathers, and heads of a filial unit. This avenue was only available to a fraction of Anglo-American men according to Shammas (Ditz, 2004: 12), excluding non-Europeans and women; these same heads of households were given legal rights to command and control the labor of others, and act as overseers. They themselves were independent individuals, free from others controlling them, as well as being dependent on anyone else. Ditz goes on to note that:

One pillar of this control, of course, was the emergence of a racialised system of mastery and servitude, a development that was at every point intertwined with the dynamics of gender. The early history of that system as illuminated by women's historians powerfully reinforces the point that the prerogatives of manliness in this context can be usefully conceived of in terms of access to and control over women. (Ditz, 2004: 12)

Finally, Kathleen Brown's *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Anxious Patriarchs* (1996: 13), in which Brown ties gender to race, explains that gender conventions in America were systematized by contrasting perceptions of difference, such as origin of birth, religion, and who was savage and who was civilized. This created a large gulf between racialised gender perceptions, and underlined the distinctions, tying domestic, unemployed, courteous, and discrete ideologies to white women, while white men were the leading patriarchal class in charge of both plantation and domestic issues. Black women and men were denied these privileges and all authority, allowing them to aspire to nothing more than base servants.

The research above clearly denotes both aspects of gender relations as they existed during the period James Fenimore Cooper wrote *The Last of the Mohicans*, but they also provide an insight into the period during which the novel is set. Through this, by reading the novel, students have the opportunity to identify how these gender norms are incorporated and perpetuated by the novel, and can thus critically examine them in the classroom. How the above gender norms relate to the ones portrayed in Cooper's novel will be explored in the next chapter.

3. Analysis

As noted earlier, the syllabus (Skolverket 2011c) prescribes directives educators need to achieve in the classroom when teaching English. Students need to be able to understand spoken and written English, develop the ability to shape their language output depending on the situation and context they find themselves in, use language strategies in different circumstances, and ultimately discuss and reflect on social living conditions, issues, and culture in places where English is used as the primary language (Skolverket 2011: 2). This chapter will illustrate how I will teach *The Last of the Mohicans* in a way that simultaneously communicates historical events and gender roles, while keeping in line with the above aims and objectives the syllabus prescribes. The chapter is divided into five sections. Section 3.1 will outline the lesson plan in broad strokes, focusing on how the allotted time under which the novel will be taught should be divided, so as to

comprise a coherent whole. Section 3.2 will delve into the specifics of the preparation phase before the novel is taught, as well as argue why the novel is appropriate for teaching historic events and gender norms. Section 3.3 contains a literary analysis of the *Last of the Mohicans* novel, using it to teach historical events in the classroom, particularly the *Siege on Fort William Henry* and the *Massacre at Fort William Henry*, within the context of the *Seven Years' War*. Section 3.4 continues the literary analysis, but focuses on teaching students to focus on the characters in the novel and the film, their gender roles, and relationships. The final section, 3.5, will discuss Michael Mann's 1992 film *Last of the Mohicans*, and the pedagogical value of using it in conjunction with the novel.

3.1. Lesson Plan Outline for Teaching *The Last of the Mohicans*

Using Cooper's novel in its entirety in the classroom is implausible, given the fact that the text was written in 1826, and contains a vivid descriptive style that stretches for roughly 480 pages. While anything is possible in theory, my attitude towards teaching this particular novel is to trim it by selecting specific chapters best suited to teaching the goals that one sets out to impart to students. Since the focus for my lessons would be to teach historic events and gender relations, those are the chapters I would extract from the book, cutting down the overall thirty three chapter book down to nineteen.

The selection criteria for the chosen chapters deals specifically with the relevant content for the goals of the lessons, and this kind of a tactic is advocated by Collie and Slater (2009: 12) as they recommend utilizing classroom activities that can supplement omitted content when a literary piece is abridged. There is a benefit to doing this, as the classroom activities that would focus on the content not covered by the reading of the novel can be used to the effect of summarizing and explaining to students the context of the sections they have read. They can also be used to check if the students had missed or misunderstood parts of it, and also prepare them for the upcoming chapters that they will read.

These classroom activities and discussions would also serve to countermand any potential issues Hedge (2000: 16) notes can arise, such as learners giving up on a book because they find the task of following along with it too gargantuan to overcome. These problems could relate specifically to lexical issues, or students' ability to identify with the content itself.

In my estimation, to successfully utilize *The Last of the Mohicans* in order to teach historical events and historical gender norms and relations, it would take seven to eight weeks to get through the abridged/tailored content. While some of the more salient chapters containing a bevy of information related to the above goals would be dealt with in class, a lot of the reading would have to be done by the students at home. They would also be encouraged to sit together in groups, and read the chapters together, discussing in groups the parts that they are having trouble understanding. These group activities are also advocated by Collie and Slater (2009: 13), as the teacher may not be in the position to get every single student on the same page regarding the book's content. This is why fostering collaboration between students to increase the chances of them keeping up with the book would be an instrumental tool in fulfilling the teaching goals.

Tricia Hedge (2000: 210-212) outlines three key phases when students read written materials; the *pre-reading phase*, the *while-reading phase*, and the *post-reading phase*. The *pre-reading phase* consists of the teacher motivating the students in order to get them to pick up the text in the first place, and delineating why the text is important for them to read at all. The second, *while-reading phase* encourages making students active readers instead of passive ones, encouraging them to examine the ideas in the text, understand the information in the chapters, and potentially how the new information relates to what they have read in the previous chapters, taking note of their expectations for the upcoming text, and even attempting to predict what happens next (Hedge, 2000: 210). The *post-reading phase* is where the first two are effectively merged and brought to the students' attention, as these should be designed to make use of the activities and goals of the previous two phases (Hedge, 2000: 2011). Planning the lessons with these three phases is an instrumental objective with regard to achieving the learning goals this essay revolves around in teaching Cooper's novel.

For the *pre-reading phase*, especially during the period the students are dealing with the first few chapters, an active and communicative discussion with the students regarding the context and the time period of the novel has to be performed. This will be done in order for the students to prepare themselves for the world they are to enter and explore through the novel, an existence far removed from their own present reality by almost two hundred years. These discussions should encourage students to collectively imagine what living in that world must have been like, with their current reality removed from the equation. This approach would

hopefully make the students adjust and adapt to the setting they are about to enter, cushioning the impact of entering a reality significantly removed from their own.

The second, *while-reading* phase will be realized by the use of worksheets, and ideally, group discussions. Teaching this novel comes with very specific learning goals in mind, and so the students will be guided to note important aspects of each chapter as they relate to the descriptions of historic events, or the relationships between the characters. Not all chapters include both facets; however, all of the chosen chapters in Cooper's novel do contain an extensive amount of material that allows the students to learn about historical events and gender norms pertinent to that era. The chapters have been carefully selected for this reason, meaning all of them have to include either lengthy passages, or snippets that relate to the learning goals. The worksheets will differ, and will be tailor-made to each, or groups of chapters, depending on the learning goals that the chapters deal with. The worksheets would not stand alone however; they would be accompanied by the historical facts written by professional historians that separate the fiction from Cooper's novel with facts that historians have been able to ascertain concerning the historical events in the novels, as well as gender norms and relations of the time. The worksheets would include questions that both deal with the material from the novel, but also the extra materials provided, in order to ensure students have the means to understand the difference between the historically fictional text, and genuinely authentic history.

The final, *post-reading* phase will be a collaborative effort between the teacher and the students. As suggested by Hedge (2000: 211), one useful way of creating a post-reading activity is to have the students actively construct questions for the text, in order to check their understanding of it. The teacher is the one to stimulate the students in developing the questions, focusing them so that they are appropriate, and then having the students answer them in groups in order to raise awareness of their own thinking processes in relation to the text they have read. This also coincides with the *pre-reading* phase, as the themes the students are supposed to pay attention to during their reading will now be practically discussed by the entire class.

Before the final phase commences however, the students will watch the 1992 film *The Last of the Mohicans*. Having already read the pertinent chapters from the novel, the students should have the requisite knowledge and understanding of how the story flows, the outcomes of significant events in the novel, as well as the ultimate fates of the characters. While the film follows the same story, and features the same historical events, it completely changes the fates of

the characters, as well as their demeanors towards one another. It also emphasizes some characters, while entirely omitting or marginalizing others. These are the aspects of the film the students will be tasked to pay attention to, actively developing their critical thinking as they compare the novel to the film along with the reasoning behind the changes between the two. The questions driving the *post-reading* phase will place the onus on this difference, prompting the students to critically examine why the differences in how historical events featured in both stories differ, and why the characters act differently. When that comparison is achieved by the students through class discussion and answering of the questions, the final *post-reading* assignment will be for students to take a stand on which version of the story they believe is the most superior one, and why, as well as detail which elements of the story they found to be compelling to them.

All of the tasks outlined above will coincide with the objectives for this project, but they will also oblige the students to read an English text by reading the novel and the associated history, thus potentially distinguishing the content as being written in a different type of context and purpose, listening to the language while they watch the film, speaking in group discussions, and writing it in order to answer questions from the worksheet, as well as delivering a final conclusion on how they experienced the content. Thus, all four skills concerning reception and production of the language will be performed by the students, helping them master their prowess of the English language.

3.2. Preparing to Teach *The Last of the Mohicans*: Contextualizing 18th Century America, and Native American History

The purpose of this essay, and its claim, is that history can be taught through literature; specifically that history can be taught through James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* in the English language classroom. The novel is directed towards students who ought to be proficient enough with the language, that they are attending the English 6 level in upper secondary schools. Before that can occur though, groundwork has to be laid for commencing the task properly, as many facets of the novel may be unintelligible to students if they are not properly situated within the realm of the topic before studying the novel.

In the *pre-reading* phase, especially before reading the very first chapter of the novel, it is important for the teacher to contextualize *The Last of the Mohicans* within the historical

framework that it had been borne from, and takes place in. It is my belief that before an understanding of characters and their relationships can transpire in the student's mind, which would be a focus on the story's minutiae and specifics (the micro-level of a story); there needs to be a macro-overview that contextualizes the period as well as the overarching societal structures from a holistic point of view. Only after those have been dealt with can personal stories be explored, as they are permanently slaved into the overarching conditions the characters in the novel find themselves in.

Therefore, before letting the students study the novel out of the blue, an introductory period is required where the setting and the period are established. The two most important aspects to mention before tackling the novel is the Seven Years' War between Britain and France which took place at the time the novel is situated in, as well as the Native American history writ large, but also specific to that period as the introduction proceeds.

The first week of teaching the novel will be used as an introductory session for the novel, and will commence with a general overview of the Native American experience from the arrival of the European settlers. This due to the fact that the chronology for that event is one that provides an earliest look at the issue, with the lesson able to move forward in a chronological sense, as opposed to switching back and forth in time (complicating the process needlessly), in order to depict the French and British War as a separate incident from the role Native Americans played in it. The introduction will begin by utilizing Howard Zinn's introductory chapter to his book *A People's History of the United States* (2009: 7), where he cites the first-hand accounts and primary sources of Bartolomé de las Casas, along with Christopher Columbus' own captain's logs and journal entries, which describe in gory detail the events that transpired after Spaniards made landfall in the Bahamas and in Cuba. Zinn's chapter should be summarized for students, explaining Columbus' and Spain's quest for resources, as well as their ruthless and torturous treatment of the Natives they beset upon their arrival (2009: 3-15). This will be accompanied by visual aids, namely maps of the Americas at the time, as well as paintings that depict Native American culture, or pictures of Native American tribes. A good example are those taken by ethnologist Edward S. Curtis from the early twentieth century, which are some of the earliest records of visual Native American cultural preservation taken over a period of thirty years (albeit later than the period in the novel).

Following this introduction, the topic will move to the time period of the Seven Years' War, and focus on the Native Americans of that time period, pointing out that the term itself is misleading, as it encompasses all of the continental tribes, akin to holding a lecture on Europeans in general. The specific peoples within the historical period, as well as in the novel, participating actively or passively in the British and French war, need to be established for the students. These are namely the six nation Iroquois tribes, but the focus should mostly rest on the Huron, Mohegan and the Mahican tribes. The Mohegan and the Mahican tribes is the "Mohican" tribe depicted in Cooper's novel, which he conflated either out of error, or intentionally in order to simplify the story. Students need to be aware of the fact that even within the title *The Last of the Mohicans*, there is a historical error, a fictionalization. This lays the groundwork for further discrepancies as they will be encountered by students later while reading the novel. Finally, an overview for the students is necessary regarding the Seven Years' War, the fact that some Native American tribes sided with the British, like the Iroquois, and some with the French, like the Huron, concluding with the territorial dispute the war centered on in order to provide the students with context for the novel. The resource for that would be Ian K. Steele's *Betrayals: Fort William Henry and the "Massacre"* (1990: 28-56), as he introduces the conflict himself, framing it around the event this project has as one of its teaching goals.

This is to be followed by stating the aims for reading the novel, clarifying for students the historical events that transpire in the novel, as well as how the different characters interact with one another, based on either their gender or race, making it clear for the students the literary elements they should focus on when reading the assorted chapters.

3.3. Teaching Historical Events by using *The Last of the Mohicans*

The first of the goals for this project is to teach historical events by using Cooper's novel, as well as the film, *The Last of the Mohicans*. Both the novel and the film depict two central events that transpired subsequently one after the other, namely the Siege of Fort William Henry, followed by the Massacre at Fort William Henry. However, there are significant differences in the depictions between the two, and furthermore there exist both minor and greater differences between the novel and the current historical record of these events. It is these differences that make for fertile soil from which one can teach the events in my estimation, as the subtlety in the differences leads to three different accounts of these events. Moreover, the fact that these events take place within

a greater literary story is what makes them interesting, as opposed to teaching the events without emotional or intellectual investment on the part of the reader in a vacuum.

The inaugurating chapters of the book deal with the introduction of the characters, as well as the forested setting, and the general inaugural meet-up of the primary and secondary characters, as they converge in an ambush of a detachment of troops en route to Fort William Henry. In the interest of time, the reading of these chapters will be kept to a minimum while reading in the classroom, as they are for the most part descriptive in the manner Mark Twain remarked, and also because these chapters are pure fiction serving only the purposes of the fictional story. That said, it is necessary to read some or parts of the chapters, in order for students to get a clear sense of not only who the characters are, but also because it is important for the students to witness the attributes the characters in the novel possess, so as to not only understand the story but also have the students invest in it emotionally and intellectually to a degree. The extraneous information the inaugural chapters provide needs to be quickly narrated by the teacher to the students, which also helps with the pace of the story moving forward, never becoming too dreary.

Reading these first few chapters, the students will be organized into four or five groups, preparing them for the tasks to come. This activity is inspired by Collie and Slater's "Snowball Summary" (2009: 106-107). Initially, the worksheets they receive will contain a diagram that assigns summarizing the events and themes of the novel, with each specific group having to focus on one pre-selected chapter that they will read at home. The students still have to read all of the chapters individually, however this exercise allows them to discuss the chapters in class as a group, fostering a better understanding of the story.

3.3.1. The Siege of Fort William Henry

The chapters that serve the teaching of the two historical events begin roughly two quarters into the novel, as the party of main and supporting characters reaches Fort William Henry, entering it as the Siege is mounted by *General Montcalm*. The sisters *Alice* and *Cora Munro* are united with their father *Colonel Munro*, as the party enters the Fort besieged by the French *General Montcalm* (Cooper, 1998: 194). While inside, fictional elements of the story take over, with the main character *Hawkeye* being sent to request reinforcements from *General Webb*, stationed at *Fort Edward*, and subsequently having failed in the task, *Duncan Heyward*, a

member of the British army previously escorting the two sisters is sent to parlay with the French, but fails to learn anything (Cooper, 1998: 200-210). Historical accuracy returns after these events, with *Montcalm* advancing on the Fort, capturing the messenger from the British *General Webb* who sent a message for *Munro*, informing the colonel that he should surrender to the French and reach the best possible terms, as help will not be coming to Fort William Henry (Cooper, 1998: 219). Dejected, *Munro* surrenders, and *Montcalm* allows the British soldier, wounded, women and children to leave the Fort, and march through the woods back to British occupied lands (Cooper, 1998: 230). In essence, Cooper blends his own fictional narrative together with the genuine historical information that was either available to him, or that he had to slightly alter in order to suit his story. The result is remarkably accurate, as he inserts his own characters into factual events.

This section deals with the first historical event that students need to pay attention to, as while it may be interspersed with fictional elements, the setting, and the progression of the story are remarkably accurate. Historians William R. Nester (2000: 53-59) and Francis Parkman (1922: 498-517) confirm as much, and that account in the novel remains part of the historical record to this day. During the reading of the chapters including this information, students will receive custom tailored worksheets that contain passages from Nester's and Parkman's historical books outlining not only the raw troop numbers at the disposal of *Monro* and *Montcalm*, but also details of the siege and mortar shelling that the Fort was under during the siege. The questions attached to the worksheets will stir students to separate fact from fiction, and urge them to think critically regarding what may or may not have actually happened, and discuss their answers afterwards as a whole class, giving the opportunity to the teacher to correct them if they conflate fiction with fact. The questions on the worksheet should be the following:

- **1. Comparing what you have read in the novel with the information provided on the worksheet by historians, separate the following events into either "Fact" or "Fiction" columns:**
- a) Colonel *Munro*'s daughters being reunited with their father.
- b) French soldiers attacking Fort William Henry with cannons and mortars.
- c) *Hawkeye* being sent by Colonel *Munro* to request reinforcements from *General Webb*.
- d) *Duncan Heyward* was sent to parley with the French in order to learn vital information on the enemy forces.
- e) *General Montcalm* caught a messenger carrying *General Webb*'s instructions for Colonel *Munro* to surrender to the French.
- f) Colonel *Munro* surrendered to *General Montcalm* after the mortar shelling became impossible to defend against.

- g) General Montcalm allowed Colonel Munro to leave the fort freely, not taking any prisoners, allowing everyone to return to their British occupied territory.
- **2. Are there any patterns or themes that you can see when deciding what is real and what is fiction in the novel? Discuss this in your group and try to find a solution.**

Having been given enough time to discuss the questions and sort what may or may not be real, the students will be asked to discuss their findings and categorization as a whole class. This will conclude with the teacher not only giving them the correct answers, but pointing out that in general, the fictional elements in the novel tend to be the ones performed by the characters that are more vital to the story, rather than authority figures determining the course of events.

3.3.2. The Massacre at Fort William Henry

The benefit of using Cooper's novel is that both historical events that can be taught follow one after another, as well as the fact that the second stems from the resolution of the first. That the accuracy of the second event deviates more from the current historical record can be considered a negative aspect, however, it is actually a benefit with regard to teaching the material. The reason it is a benefit is because of the sequential nature of the content, which follows after the students have had time to think about how the previous section was dealt with. The contrast between fact and fiction in handling the next historical occurrence thus serves to elucidate for the students how historical events can be written about by authors by still keeping the general outline accurate, however exaggerating the outcome and the motivation of the aggressors.

Cooper establishes the premise for the Massacre before *Munro's* surrender, by having an exchange between *Montcalm* and *Magua* (Cooper, 1998: 225), the Huron main antagonist in the story that had been chasing *Munro's* daughters to exact revenge. While the exchange is fictional, and serving the story's progression, the realistic historical element is that the Huron did fight on the side of the French during the Seven Years' War. The exchange between the two regards *Magua's* disappointment with the fact that *Montcalm* seeks to accept *Munro's* surrender (Cooper, 1998: 226). *Montcalm* however insinuates to *Magua* that it would not be to his own benefit for the British to return to their army, only to have to fight them again on another battlefield; *Montcalm* himself cannot break the agreement of the surrender, however *Magua* and his tribe are not bound by the treaty, and may do with the retreating British forces as they will (Cooper, 1998: 227). This is soon followed by the pivotal description of the event in the novel, as *Munro* and his garrison, carrying no ammunition, begin the trek through the forest to Fort Edward; in the novel

they are ambushed by two thousand “Indians”, with *Magua* at the helm, the Natives eventually slaughtering what appears to be roughly one thousand five hundred defenseless British subjects (Cooper, 1998: 233-239).

The historical record matches with Cooper’s depictions to a degree, as far as the procession of events is concerned, however deviates greatly when it concerns the outcome, and reasoning behind it. This event actually has genuine historical witness accounts of those who were in the retreating British column, such as the testimony of one Colonel Joseph Frye, who had been stripped of his clothing, and was forced to flee into the woods in order to survive (Dodge, 1998: 91-92). One of the reasons Cooper’s depictions has an inaccurate sense of the outcome can be attributed to the fact that the historical record regarding the Massacre has changed throughout the years. William Nester (2000: 62) notes that the initial estimates of the killed and wounded at the time matched Cooper’s own portrayal in the novel, with roughly one thousand five hundred, to two thousand killed and wounded. Ian Steele’s reconstruction of the event (1990: 144) however, estimates that there had only been sixty nine to one hundred and eighty four dead and missing, which was a significantly lesser amount of afflicted out of the roughly two thousand three hundred that surrendered to *Montcalm*.

The brutal treatment of the British began much earlier than their march commenced in reality however; Nester notes (2000: 59) that the day before under Montcalm’s supervision, the Native Americans stormed the fort and began looting and scalping the British inside. Although Montcalm attempted to prevent the slaughter by instructing the tribal leaders to relent, he did not act even when confronted by Monro that the terms of the capitulation had been violated. *The Last of the Mohicans* (1998: 232) makes a concerted effort to portray the Native American attacks as savage as possible, by having “savages” kill the babies of British mothers during the massacre.

These alignments and discrepancies between the story in the novel, and the actual historical record are, to reiterate, a benefit when teaching the specific history through the novel. The reason is that while the story follows the general events rather faithfully, the details themselves do not match, forcing students to recognize the dissonance between fact and fiction. This however has to be prompted by the teacher through classroom exercises. The worksheets that will be handed out after the conclusion of the chapters that detail the Massacre at Fort William Henry will include the relevant passages from the historians Dodge, Nester and Steele, but the contents on the worksheets should be minimal, so as not to add too many additional

materials to what is already a challenging task. The following questions should then follow the historical information provided, in order to have students reflect on what they have read, and how it stands in concord with actual historical events, but also transition into a group discussion:

- Having read about the Massacre at Fort William Henry in the novel, and the historical information provided above, as well as how the historical facts have changed throughout the years, what do you personally think happened?
- Do you think the real General Montcalm bears responsibility for the Massacre? How about the fictionalized one in the novel?
- What do you think the motivation of the Native Americans that attacked the British was?
- What kind of an effect do you think *The Last of the Mohicans* had on the people who read it a few years after it was published?
- Who was the novel written for in the first place? Who was Cooper's intended audience?

It is vital for the students to have enough time to both think about these questions for themselves, discuss them in their groups after writing or considering some answers, and then discussing the questions as a whole class. Students also need to be allowed to form their own questions and discuss them in the class. After the discussion has run its course, the teacher should reveal to the students Steele's estimation (1990: 184) of what the motivation of the Native Americans might have been for committing the massacre; namely, that the Natives were promised riches, trophies, scalping and taking of captives by the French leaders for fighting on their behalf, with the promise never materializing after Monro's surrender. All of the significant provisions after the surrender went to the French army, as well as the British personal possessions, leaving nothing to the Native Americans; additionally making the act appear as if the British and the French were conspiring against the Native Americans (Steele, 1990: 185).

Once this information is imparted to the students by the teacher, the students should be prompted to discuss and reflect upon the motivation of the Native Americans committing the massacre. The students should examine whether or not the actions of the different tribe members were savage within the context of the time period, and if they themselves deemed their actions to be savage, does that make the Natives irredeemable savages themselves. The central focus of the dialogue ought to be given to the consideration of what the rationale behind the Massacre means for the students' understanding of the event, and how it differs from the novel's depiction.

The lesson will end with the teacher focusing on the final question in the worksheet, namely who was intended to read *The Last of the Mohicans*, and what kind of an effect the

book's depiction of the events might have had on the readers, if they had not had the privilege of having nearly two hundred years of hindsight to reflect on the historical record of these events. Ultimately, the discussion must not force value judgments upon the students, making them feel right or wrong for condemning or condoning the actions of either Montcalm or the Native Americans, as that is not the goal of the lesson. Their personal experiences and impressions with the text along with the historic facts should only be used to teach them to critically examine fictional and real accounts of historic events side by side.

During the lessons where these two events transpire in the chapters that the students are reading, the focus in discussions regarding the content of the chapters should take precedence on emphasizing the historical descriptions in the novel, as they provide the situational, or macro-account of the setting and story. At all other times however, particularly when the historical events have been dealt with in the classroom, the focus should switch onto the interpersonal elements in the novel, namely the characters and the way they relate and interact with one another.

3.4. Teaching Historical Gender Norms by using *The Last of the Mohicans*

One of the primary elements of a novel that engages its audience is the characters that it features throughout the course of its storyline. Since *The Last of the Mohicans* was the second entry in a pentalogy, and has been one of the most popular novels ever written regardless of how one may feel about it, there must be some compelling qualities to the novel for it to endure in such a way. A primary element of this in my estimation is the novel's portrayal of its characters, though it is not their depth and quality on their own what make them interesting. What makes the characters in Cooper's novel interesting is how they have stood against the test of time. Almost two hundred years after the novel had been written, some of the characters and their actions may appear to be as normal today as their portrayal in the book for the period of the middle eighteenth century may have been when it was written. On the other hand, some of the characters may appear strange or irregular to contemporary audiences.

While the students are taking charge of the novel, the worksheets that they are provided with need to direct their attention to how they experience the characters. To have some tangible way of relating to the characters, it is my belief that aspects of gender must be examined in order to reveal how they inform the actions all of the characters perform in the story, how they behave

towards one another, and analyze why that may be the case. Initial worksheets to be handed out with the relevant chapters will include, as an introduction to the themes, questions that would rouse the students to focus on the goals of the project; thinking about current gender norms and roles vs. past ones. These should include:

- Which qualities and personality traits do you associate with masculinity, and which do you associate with femininity?
- Is it normal for men to exemplify feminine traits, and women to exemplify masculine traits? If yes, why, if not, why not? Has that always been the case?
- Can you think of any repercussions that might befall someone today if they do not act according to their gender? What about in the past?
- What kind of jobs do you consider either masculine or feminine? Can men perform women's jobs, and vice versa? Has that always been true?
- Can you think of any specific behavioral patterns expected in society of men or women that are racially different?

While there may be many additional aspects that could be analyzed, such as class and social status, ethnicity, etcetera, this essay will narrow the scope primarily to gender, with race being prominent only insofar as it informs gender differences. The reason for this is that the rate of complexity for analysis increases with each additional variable added for comparison. Gender in my opinion, is the most obvious and thus the most approachable variable in examining the characters, as is the general racial element, without delving too deeply into it. Should students be thirsty for higher levels of complexity, teachers can certainly accommodate them by introducing more variables to compare the characters against.

Part of the Swedish general curriculums (Skolverket 2011a: 11 and 2011b: 9), as well as the Education Act (SFS 2010: 800) make mention of how important the principles of equality and democracy are within the school system, noting that any kind of discrimination on any grounds, such as gender, class, and race is impermissible, and should be actively combatted with information, open discussion, and dynamic measures in the event they do transpire. A discussion that relates to gender and the differing norms from the time Cooper's novel was written and set in, to the norms in contemporary society, should provide an excellent resource in examining how students relate to gender roles, and therefore an opportunity presents itself for teachers to actively promote the values the Swedish school system endeavors to instill.

One of the primary selectors for choosing which chapters of *The Last of the Mohicans* to teach are the references in the novel that deal with how gender roles are performed by each of the characters, and the attitudes they have towards one another. The gender roles and values in the

novel correspond less to the standards of equality we hold in our contemporary society, as reflected by the government documents regulating the Swedish education system, and correspond more to the norms featured in the “Theory” chapter of this essay, from sources that examined social and gender roles during or around the period when the novel takes place and was written in. The gender roles in Cooper’s novel reflect that research, however they also subvert it to a degree; Native American men are symbolically afforded an equality of character when compared with the Anglo-Americans, as opposed to the outright designation that they should fulfill the role of a servant, as referenced earlier by Brown (1996: 13).

Anglo-American men in the novel are presented as distinguished gentlemen reflecting values of courage, combat prowess, and refined intellect which they use to maintain a sense of verbal decorum, especially when conversing with females. An example of this, of which there are many, is *Duncan Heyward’s* reply to the two sisters when assuring them of their safety: “...but I know that your safety, and that of Cora, is far dearer to me than could be any orchestra of Handel’s music”. Passages like these will be pointed out to students through worksheets, and have the students reflect upon how Anglo-American men are portrayed in the novel either from their interactions with others, or through the way Cooper describes them with a narrator’s voice. The description of *Uncas*, essentially the titular character of the novel, is introduced and described by Cooper thusly:

The Native bore the tomahawk and knife of his tribe; and yet his appearance was not altogether that of a warrior. On the contrary, there was an air of neglect about his person, like that which might have proceeded from great and recent exertion, which he had not yet found leisure to repair. The colors of the war-paint had blended in dark confusion about his fierce countenance and rendered his swarthy lineaments still more savage and repulsive than if art had attempted an effect which had been thus produced by chance. His eye alone, which glistened like a fiery star amid lowering clouds, was to be seen in its state of native wildness. (Cooper, 1998: 39)

His demeanor and appearance straddle the line between a human and an animal. That is not to say the writing is condemnable in any shape or form, however the differences are consistent throughout the novel, and stark. Writing about the novel, *The Mohican Press* (1997) remarked that *The Last of the Mohicans* was one of instrumental pieces of literature that perpetuated the popular opinions of Native Americans being resourceful, fearless and strong men, as well as stoic and wise, just like *Uncas’* father *Chingachgook* is portrayed. Students should be made aware that

the popularization and subsequent stereotyping of Native Americans stems from novels like the one they are reading, and not from any genuine historical record.

Not digressing from gender however, although there may be subtle differences alluding to class in the novel, the men (protagonists especially) are all for the most part portrayed in the same manner: stoic, strong, brave, daring, enduring, etcetera. These qualities do not vary much between the Anglo-American or Native American representations of men in the book. This is why Cooper wrote the main character of the pentalogy, *Hawkeye*, as a Native American adopted descendant of Anglo-American parents, in order to embody the qualities of the “savage” Native American culture, as well as the civilized Anglo-American culture, with the conflict in his allegiances being questioned perpetually throughout the novel. Again though, differences in the qualities men are capable of having are equal across the board in the novel.

Women however are a completely different matter. On the subject of women in *The Last of the Mohicans*, one could easily commence by summarizing the novel as an adventure story where an insidious Native American villain attempts to kidnap two helpless Anglo-American sisters on multiple occasions, with the male heroes coming to their rescue without fail every single time (excluding the conclusion of the novel). Yet, while that may be an accurate superficial description, there is a depth and characterization of the women to a degree in the novel; the only two women featured in the novel as actual characters. Both are described in the novel from the outset as follows:

One, and she was the most juvenile in her appearance, though both were young, permitted glimpses of her dazzling complexion, fair golden hair, and bright blue eyes, to be caught, as she artlessly suffered the morning air to blow aside the green veil which descended low from her beaver. The flush which still lingered above the pines in the western sky was not more bright nor delicate than the bloom on her cheek; nor was the opening day more cheering than the animated smile which she bestowed on the youth, as he assisted her into the saddle. The other, who appeared to share equally I the attentions of the young officer, concealed her charms from the gaze of the soldier, with a care that seemed better fitted to the experience of four or five additional years. It could be seen, however, that her person, though molded with the same exquisite proportions, of which none of the graces were lost by the traveling dress she wore, was rather fuller and more mature than that of her companion. (Cooper, 1998: 41)

Put simply, the women are introduced (and depicted throughout the novel) as a pair of females whose virtues are chiefly their appearance, passive manner of behavior, and innocence. The distinction between the two being age and intelligence, and what we would in later chapters come to find out, racial differences, as the older sister’s mother is from the West Indies. In consideration of the story, both of the sisters, and especially *Alice*, could be replaced by any

object of significant sentimental value, and the story would not remain any less for it. *Cora* however, has a prominence in the story as she performs her gendered racial and moral standard of never yielding to *Magua*'s advances or insinuations to make her his wife (a lot of the times a synonym for property in the novel), stating that she would rather commit suicide, than be together with him, finding the idea repulsive and shameful to her being (Cooper, 1998: 145).

Having the students ardently aware of these character depictions and traits as they are reading the novel is vital in having them understand how closely the actions the characters in the story perform, how they are described, and how they speak are tied to their gender. One of the literary elements that students will be made aware of in examining the character of *Cora* is the concept of the "tragic mulatta". Diane Roberts (1994: 173) suggests that *Cora* is the first tragic mulatta in American literature, fitting the stereotype of a woman with bi-racial parents that by the end of any novel have only two outcomes; slavery or death. *Cora*'s character is threatened with slavery from the onset of the story, and ultimately dies by *Magua*'s hand, fitting the stereotype. This recurring literary element will be good for students to have a handle on before reaching the conclusion of the novel, however it should be presented to them after the revelation that *Cora* is of mixed-race, urging them to take note of her character development. Something that should be easy, as she is quintessentially the only developed female character in the novel.

The above characteristics of the male and female characters in the novel are the bare minimum of what should be discussed in the classroom after each consecutive chapter, the teacher always making sure that the students have the opportunity to observe both contemporary gender values, but also historical ones.

3.5. Using *The Last of the Mohicans* film to teach the novel

Briefly mentioned earlier, the 1992 Michael Mann film *The Last of the Mohicans* is an excellent pedagogical companion to the novel. The reason is what Collie and Slater (2009: 52-53) term as "visual prompts" especially when used with this kind of material:

Visual prompts are extremely helpful to learners working their way through a long, and sometimes complex, work. They function as a constant reminder of the book's various elements.

Examples of these are charts referenced earlier, such as snowball summaries. However, a visual prompt can also be an audiovisual experience such as a film. The reason this film in particular is an outstanding companion piece is because it is not a direct adaptation of the novel, but functions (as elaborated on earlier) as a response to the novel. The key differentiating elements between the novel and the film are those dealing with the goals of this project: depiction of historical events, and gender roles.

The film will be shown to the students only after they have finished reading the novel, because the novel, along with the exercises, worksheets, and historical information provided during the reading phase will form the basis of their understanding of the events. The film will elucidate the events of the novel in as realistic and vivid a manner as possible, while providing them with a narrative they should be familiar with by the time they get to watch the movie. The film portrays the Siege of Fort William Henry and the Massacre at Fort William Henry as faithfully as possible, removing as many extraneous fictional elements from the storyline, aside from the ones which concern the main characters. The second event in particular is far more realistically portrayed, as well as updated to align *Magua's* quest for revenge with the historical intent of the Native Americans as theorized by Steele (1990), and expanded on in the previous section.

The second revision pertains to the characters, most notably *Cora*. In the film (Mann, 1992), she is not a woman of mixed heritage, eliminating entirely the “tragic mulatta” stereotype. Her behavior is different as well, as she takes control of her own destiny, brandishing a gun almost from the first moment she appears on the screen. More than a lady in distress waiting for a man to rescue her, *Cora's* intelligence throughout the film allows her to overcome the obstacles facing her, ultimately surviving the adventure; the character that dies is instead *Alice*, by committing suicide (Mann, 1992). *Alice's* character remains a carbon copy of the one in the novel, serving as an allegory for the individual that has also read the novel to showcase how an individual conforming to passive and taciturn, in a sense outdated gender norms, has no place in the savage reality the rest of the characters inhabit. *Uncas* (Mann, 1992) dies in much the same way as he perishes in the novel, however his death takes on another meaning in the film, as his death is cause for lamentation of the loss of the final Mohican (symbolizing the Native American genocide), rather than a signpost for the end of savagery, which is the moral the novel ends with.

These changes are the ones that students will ultimately be informed of before being given the opportunity to critically analyze the literature by using the film, with genuine historical records. The lessons are to conclude in a final task with the students where they are asked to note the differences between the novel, the film, and the historical record, culminating in an examination of how well they have internalized all of the key elements of the goals for the project. The examination should however be short in nature, and should allow the students to expand upon what they have observed and taken away from the lessons in the form of writing regarding their personal experience with the content, rather than answering questions designed to test how well they have paid attention to it. The questions will be open-ended, allowing students to focus on the elements they themselves choose to focus on, be it depictions of historical events, or historical and contemporary gender norms, and how they tie into the novel and film. These can be formed at the teacher's prerogative, but should follow a model that is based on reflection, and not interrogation.

4. Conclusion and Final Reflections

The primary objective of this essay was to demonstrate how historical events and gender norms can be taught by utilizing literature in an English second-language classroom at the English 6 level. More specifically, it set out to detail how one could use James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* to teach students about European colonial history, Native American history, and a portion of the events that transpired during the Seven Years' War, as well as emphasize the gender norms of the period by focusing on a portrayal of fictional characters depicted within the setting of eighteenth century continental America.

The goal was also to have the content take into account and follow not only the prescriptions the Swedish syllabus for upper secondary education provides, but to also further students' goals in improving their skills with the English language regarding reception and production of the language by utilizing all of the four skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. This essay prescribes an amalgam of contents and considerations strategically designed to cater to improving the students' language skills, by providing an abridged and challenging piece of literature, while providing tasks that are intended to foster communication and understanding within the class. Additionally, the students are required to watch a film based on the novel, one that expressly highlights the teaching goals of this essay.

The Last of the Mohicans has in my estimation proven to be a remarkably well suited choice for teaching historical events and gender norms, as it is rife with detailed descriptions of the historical setting it takes place in as well as historically gendered interactions between the characters. The only negative aspect is its verbosity and length, knockdowns that have been addressed in one form or another by not only abridging the content, but also planning for an extensive amount of class discussion in order to help students along with the reading of the text. At the English 6 level however, students are meant to be taking more challenging texts to study, a challenge that Cooper's novel provides.

All of the exercises intended to accompany the text were designed to be minimal in scope, as over-encumbering the students with a lot of post-reading materials would make the experience both more difficult, but also unwieldy as far as the time frame within which the reading is supposed to be accomplished is concerned. The scope of analysis is also somewhat diminished by not utilizing factors of social class and ethnicity to the fullest extent, as examining those literary elements in the novel would have been a boon for exercising students' ability for critical analysis of a complex work of historical fiction. That said, enthusiastic students are not only allowed, but encouraged to consider these factors through the minimalistic design of the examination phase, as they should be inspired to write freely to make a comparative analysis between the novel, film and the historical facts while using any set of criteria they themselves choose. The ones within the framework of the lessons are only what I consider to be the essential starting points in order to understand the literature on an intermediary level.

In conclusion, *The Last of the Mohicans* lives up to being more than adequate when it comes to teaching history through literature, with the only limiting factor being its size. Any historical inaccuracies, omissions or fictionalizations only serve to provide a contrast a skilled teacher can point to, in order to make the discussion and the critical analysis of its literary themes more poignant.

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