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Magua: The most “Homeric” of James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking* Characters

In 1923 D. H. Lawrence located the “archetypal” characters of Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* in the epic and argued that these novels “form a sort of American *Odyssey*, with Natty Bumppo for Odysseus”.¹ In 1969 Joel Porte described *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Prairie* as “the two most epic-like of the Leather-Stocking books,” in which “Cooper wrote, in the broadest sense, his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*”.² The best treatment of the *Last of the Mohicans* in relation to classical epic remains John P. McWilliams Jr, *The American Epic: Transforming a Genre, 1770-1860*,³ though what is said about Magua needs to be partially revised.

The full title of the novel in question, which takes place during the French and Indian war (1754-1763), is *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757*. It was first published in two volumes in 1826 by H. C. Carey & I. Lea of Philadelphia. The only explicit internal evidence for its relation to Homer are the three Iliadic epigraphs, given in the translation of Alexander Pope, which was composed in 1715-1720. They all occur in vol. 2., which constitutes the second part of the novel, and open respectively chapters VII, XII, XV.⁴

To the best of my knowledge, it has gone unnoticed that all three epigraphs are associated not with Uncas, who according to Darnell⁵ and others is the true “hero” of the novel, standing for the “gentle noble savage”, nor with Natty (Hawk-eye), the chief hero of the *Leatherstocking Tales*, but with Magua, the Huron who plays the “villain” in the novel and whom McWilliams, Jr. labels the “brutal Satanic villain” and Gutjahr the “Prince of Darkness himself”⁶ –actually Magua is nowhere identified with “Satan”, while the characterization “devil” is applied to all hostile Indians. Quite curiously, however, the epigraphs in question, which obviously and quite significantly express the narrator’s and possibly the author’s viewpoint, link Magua with the Homeric heroes Achilles, Agamemnon, and Nestor, and highlight his unsurpassed eloquence and power of persuasion in Indian assemblies. The tale of his captives, Cora and Alice, which triggers and advances action in vol. 2, reflects respective events that trigger the main action in the opening of *Iliad* 1. I will have the opportunity to explain this in discussing the second and the third of the epigraphs.⁷

As noted above, all three epigraphs are found in vol. 2 and specifically in the section that leads to the denouement of the story. This probably implies that in Cooper’s mind, not ours, it must have been the properly “Homeric” section of the novel, and that Magua is the most “Homeric” of his characters.

¹ Greenspan, et al. (2014) [1923], 54.35.

² Porte (1969), 39.

³ McWilliams, Jr (1989), chapter 5, “Red Achilles, Red Satan”.

⁴ Corresponding respectively to chapters 24, 29, 32 of the single volume edition.

⁵ Darnell (1965).

⁶ McWilliams, Jr (1989), 141; Gutjahr (2009), 25.

⁷ Quotations from Cooper’s novel are derived from Gutjahr’s critical edition (2009), which is based primarily on the 2-volume first edition. Pope’s translation is quoted from the 1817 edition, because of its chronological proximity to the publication date of *The Last of the Mohicans*. Translations of other Iliadic passages are by Green (2015) and the Greek text by West (1998).

Epigraph to vol. 2, chapter VII

“Thus spoke the sage: the kings without delay

Dissolve the council, and their chief obey.” –*Pope’s Iliad*⁸

The Homeric context of the epigraph –Agamemnon’s plan, as communicated to the Achaean kings, to test the spirit of the troops by telling them to board the ships and go, and Nestor’s approving speech⁹ is unrelated to what goes on in Cooper’s novel, chapter VII of vol. 2. As with most epigraphs, the original context is different and that which matters is the substance of what is said or done. What the present epigraph is probably intended to convey is the unique combination within the space of two lines of the effect on the Achaean kings of two voices, supreme in their power of persuasion. The first is that of the aged king of Pylos, a wise, experienced, and persuasive counsellor and orator, with whom Cooper’s readers were familiar from Pope’s 10-line-long praise in *Iliad* 1.329-338 (= 247-253). The second is the voice of Agamemnon, which carried the authority of the commander in chief of the Achaean forces.

Both voices and their effect on the Achaean kings are reflected on Magua’s eloquence and authority, when in chapter VII of vol. 2 he addresses the council of the Huron chiefs. This will be the first time in the entire novel that we see Magua performing within the Indian community¹⁰ and specifically among his own people at the Huron village.

As Magua enters the council lodge, the narrator refers to him as “a warrior of powerful frame” (292) and next as an “artful and dreaded chief” (293), and he proceeds to mention his “cunning” and “eloquence” (294). When Magua and the Mohican Uncas, who is held captive by the Hurons, confront each other, they are described as “two bold and untamed spirits” (294). What is to be decided by the council of Huron chiefs is Uncas’ fate. When the latter launches against the Hurons the taunt of cowardice,¹¹ Magua seizes the occasion to embark on his oration. Here, as in his other speech at the Delaware village, Magua shows himself familiar with Cicero’s three aims of the orator (“to prove your thesis to the audience, to delight the audience, and to emotionally move the audience”) and other skills of classical rhetoric, never neglecting *actio*. I quote the relevant passage (295-296):

Dropping the light robe of skin from his shoulder, he stretched forth his arm, and commenced a burst of his dangerous and artful eloquence. However much his influence among his people had been impaired by his occasional and besetting weakness, as well as by his desertion of the tribe, his courage, and his fame as an orator, were undeniable. He never spoke without auditors, and rarely without making converts to his opinions.

⁸ *Il.* 2.107-108 = 2.84-86 “Ὡς ἄρα φωνήσας βουλῆς ἐξ ἤρχε νέεσθαι, / οἱ δ’ ἐπανεστήσαν πειθόντό τε ποιμένι λαῶν / σκηπτοῦχοι βασιλῆες.”

⁹ Actually, Nestor’s speech appears unrelated to Agamemnon’s plan; cf. Kirk (1985), 123: “The surprising thing is that he makes no reference to the peculiar idea of a test of moral –indeed his concluding remark [...] is most appropriate to a version in which that idea was never mentioned.”

¹⁰ His earlier presence at the Huron village, reported by David Gamut, was too brief; it lasted only for the time needed to separate Cora from Alice (271).

¹¹ Uncas alludes here to an earlier episode concerning a young Huron, who was executed by his father for cowardice.

Magua delivers a masterful speech,¹² divided in three parts, the first two of which are given in indirect speech and the last one in direct speech. Having finished the account of the battle around Glenn's Falls, the death of his associates and the escape of the Hurons' most formidable enemies (Hawk-eye and the Mohicans), Magua pauses to watch the effect of his speech on the audience (296):

Here he paused, and looked about him, in affected veneration for the departed –but, in truth, to note the effect of his opening narrative. As usual, every eye was riveted on his face. Each dusky figure seemed a breathing statue, so motionless was the posture, so intense the attention of the individual.

Part 2 of Magua's speech comprises what in an ancient funeral speech would have been the section dedicated to the "praise of the dead". Worthy of attention is the change in tone and pitch in Magua's voice (296):

Then Magua dropped his voice, which had hitherto been clear, strong, and elevated, and touched upon the merits of the dead. No quality that was likely to command the sympathy of an Indian, escaped his notice. One had never been known to follow the chase in vain; another had been indefatigable on the trail of their enemies. This was brave; that, generous. In short, he so managed his allusions, that in a nation which was composed of so few families, he contrived to strike every chord that might find, in its turn, some breast in which to vibrate.

Magua now comes to the last and most important part of his oration. Speaking in the name of the dead, he appeals to the deepest feelings of his audience: for the spirits of the dead to find rest, Uncas must die. I quote two sections of it (296-297):

"Are the bones of my young men," he concluded, "in the burial place of the Hurons! You know they are not. Their spirits are gone towards the setting sun, and are already crossing the great waters, to the happy hunting grounds. But they departed without food, without guns or knives, without moccasins, naked and poor, as they were born. Shall this be? Are their souls to enter the land of the just, like hungry Iroquois, or unmanly Delawares; or shall they meet their friends with arms in their hands, and robes on their backs? [...] Brothers, we must not forget the dead; a red skin never ceases to remember. We will load the back of this Mohican, until he staggers under our bounty, and despatch him after my young men. They call to us for aid, though our ears are not open; they say, forget us not. [...]."

I draw attention especially to Magua's argument for killing Uncas as being a gesture of not forgetting the dead, something demanded by both the speaker and the dead themselves. In this and other points there are noticeable parallels with Achilles' dream of Patroclus and the funeral of Patroclus in the *Iliad*. The

¹² Cf. also vol. 1, chapter XI, 144-146.

learned reader will recall the opening words of Patroclus' ghost to sleeping Achilles, who complains that his companion has forgotten him:

“You sleep, and you’ve proved forgetful of me, Achilles.
While I lived you didn’t neglect me—now I’m dead you do! [...]”
(*Il.* 23.69-70)

The “spirits” of the dead Hurons cannot enter “the land of the just” until they are properly revenged, recalling Patroclus' ψυχή, which cannot enter the realm of Hades, until Patroclus' body has been buried:

“[...] Bury me with all speed, let me pass through Hādēs' gates—
The spirits, the shades of the dead, are keeping me out,
won't let me cross the river to mingle with them, so here
I uselessly wander outside Hādēs' wide-gated realm. [...]”
(*Il.* 23.71-74)

While mourning Patroclus in *Iliad* 18, Achilles had vowed not to bury him until he has taken revenge on his killer and had promised to sacrifice in front of his pyre twelve noble Trojans:

But now, Patroklos, since the earth will claim me later
than you, I'll not bury you till I've brought here Hektōr's
armor and head—he, the killer of your mighty heart;
and in front of your pyre I shall cut the throats of a dozen
noble Trojan youths, so enraged I am at your slaying.
(*Il.* 18.333-337)

Both promises he will keep at the time of Patroclus' funeral and will include them in the farewell address to his companion:

Then to the pyre he set fire's iron might, to consume it,
and groaned aloud, and called on his dear comrade by name:
“Greetings, Patroklos, even in the realm of Hādēs!
See, now I'm fulfilling all that I promised you earlier:
twelve noble sons of the high-spirited Trojans—all these,
with you, the flames will devour; but Priam's son
Hektōr I'll not give to fire, but to dogs to feed on.”
(*Il.* 23.177-183)

The impact of Magua's speech on the audience was so persuasive and his concluding invitation “Let, then, this Delaware die” so compelling, that almost instantly one of the Hurons rose, uttered a yell, and hurled his tomahawk against Uncas but Magua's arm diverted its aim. I quote the telling comment of the narrator (297):

The effect of such an harangue, delivered in the nervous language, and with the emphatic manner of a Huron orator, could scarcely be mistaken. Magua had so artfully blended the natural sympathies with the

religious superstition of his auditors, that their minds, already prepared by custom to sacrifice a victim to the *manes* of their countrymen, lost every vestige of humanity in a wish for instant revenge. One warrior in particular, a man of wild and ferocious mien, had been conspicuous for the attention he had given to the words of the speaker. His countenance had changed with each passing emotion, until it settled into a continued and deadly look of malice.

Epigraph to vol. 2, chapter XII

"The assembly seated, rising o'er the rest,
Achilles thus the king of men address'd." *Pope's Homer*¹³

The second and third Homeric epigraphs are drawn from the opening of the *Iliad*. Agamemnon is holding Chryseis, the daughter of Chryses, priest of Apollo, as his captive prize. He dismisses brusquely her father, when he comes to ransom her, and Apollo visits the Achaean camp with a 9-day plague. On the 10th day Achilles calls the Achaeans to assembly (epigraph to chapter XII) and proposes to Agamemnon that they question a seer about the reason for Apollo's anger and the means to end it. The seer Calchas predicts that there will be no end to the plague until the Achaeans give the daughter back to her father without ransom (epigraph to chapter XV). Agamemnon releases Chryseis to her father but demands and receives in recompense a comparable prize, the captive Briseis, Achilles' war prize. It is this which provokes Achilles' wrath (*menis*) and his withdrawal from fighting. Agamemnon will later offer to return Briseis along with rich spoils, but Achilles will accept the offer only after the death of Patroclus.

What triggers the action in the *Iliad* is the fate of two captive girls, Chryseis and Briseis. In analogous terms the action of vol. 2 of Cooper's novel is triggered by the discovery that the two daughters of colonel Munro, Cora and Alice, have been taken and are held captive by Magua. The whole second half, from beginning to end, treats the chase of Magua by a search party for the release of Cora and Alice.¹⁴ It comprises the scout Hawk-eye, the two Mohicans Chingachgook and Uncas, young Major Duncan Heyward, and colonel Munro, former commander of Fort William Henry. At the Delaware village Alice is reunited with her father, but the chase of Magua for the release of Cora is pursued to the very end by Uncas, Duncan, and Hawk-eye.

Colonel Munro, the "Chryses" of Cooper's novel, plays a relatively minor role in the search for his two daughters. The main roles are assigned to lovers, and specifically to Uncas (in love with Cora) and Duncan (in love with Alice). The captor himself is also attracted to Cora, to whom in the very end he will offer an impossible choice, to share his bed (wigwam) or die by his knife.¹⁵ Achilles' attachment to Briseis is evident throughout the epic and even a promise of future

¹³ *Il.* 1.77-78 = 1.57-58 "οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν ἤγερθεν ὀμηγερέες τ' ἐγένοντο, / τοῖσι δ' ἀνιστάμενος μετέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς."

¹⁴ Cora and Alice were captured by Magua and his Hurons also in chapters X-XII of vol. 1, while on their way to Fort William Henry, and were released by Hawk-eye and the two Mohicans.

¹⁵ Cf. his earlier proposals to Cora in 142-149 (chapter XI of vol. 1).

marriage is heard while she is mourning of Patroclus.¹⁶ Agamemnon shares the bed first of Chryseis, and then of Briseis, whom she “abducts” from Achilles, though he eventually returns her to her former lover—modern novels rewrite the *Iliad* along similar lines. One final point of contact between the epic and the novel plot. Achilles captured Chryseis when he sacked the city of Thebe in Asian Minor (*Il.* 1.366-369) and Briseis when he sacked her native city of Lyrnessos (*Il.* 2.689-693) and killed her husband and her three brothers (*Il.* 19.291-296). In analogous terms Magua seized Cora and Alice after their virtual home, Fort William Henry, was captured by the French army and its “inhabitants” (soldiers, women, and children) were massacred by their allies, the Hurons.

At the Huron village Magua will separate Alice from Cora and deliver the latter to the neighboring village of the Delawares. The Delawares were also allies of the French but had no part in the atrocities committed at Fort William Henry. In chapter XI of vol. 2 Magua goes to their village to reclaim Cora, his prisoner. He is met by Hard-heart, the Delawares’ “most approved orator”, with whom he has a contest of wits. The Delaware wins the first round, since Magua fails to achieve an assurance that Cora will be returned to him and to extract information regarding the presence at the village of his white enemies. Magua manages to win the favor of the Delawares, however, by offering gifts and skilfully distributing them among their chiefs. Upon learning of the presence of whites in the village he reveals to them that they have provided hospitality to “La longue carabine” (Hawk-eye), the mortal enemy of the French, and warns them of the dangerous consequences. The Delawares are first startled and then alarmed. Consequently, they decide to hold a “solemn and formal assemblage of the nation”, something which was extremely rare. The narrator comments as follows on Magua’s attitude during the commotion that the name of the scout caused and the consultations that followed regarding the action to be taken (338):

During all these movements, and in the midst of the general commotion, Magua had not only maintained his seat, but the very attitude he had originally taken, against the side of the lodge, where he continued as immovable, and, apparently, as unconcerned, as if he had no interest in the result. Not a single indication of the future intentions of his hosts, however, escaped his vigilant eyes. With his consummate knowledge of the nature of the people with whom he had to deal, he anticipated every measure on which they decided; and it might almost be said, that in many instances, he knew their intentions even before they became known to themselves.

The assembly is held in the presence of Tamenund, the aged and revered patriarch of the Delawares, and after the persons whom the deliberations concern, that is Cora, Duncan, Hawk-eye, and Alice, have been brought forth. Here chapter XII begins.¹⁷ According to its epigraph, “The assembly seated, rising o’er the rest, / Achilles thus the king of men address’d.” The speaker at the Delaware assembly is Magua; the issue is to claim Cora as his prisoner as well as the other

¹⁶ *Il.* 19.297-299 “you said you’d see me the lawful wedded wife / of godlike Achilles, you’d take me back on your ships to Phthië, and hold a marriage feast for me among the Myrmidons.”

¹⁷ In order to delay Magua’s suspected scheme, Duncan poses as “La longue Carabine” but a shooting contest with Hawk-eye soon reveals the truth.

captives; the king whose favor he will try to win is Tamenund. It will be a difficult task, also considering that Tamenund has not even looked at him so. In order to flatter the Delawares Magua speaks in French and praises their nation. Of the three colored tribes the Great Spirit created, he says, the black ones are destined to be slaves for ever, the white ones are given to greed and deceit,¹⁸ and only the red ones "he fashioned to his own mind". Magua's praise of the way of life and the manners of the Indians attracts the attention of everyone in the audience. It reaches its climax when he mentions "the greatest and most beloved" nation of the Great Spirit and thus provokes the enthusiasm of his audience, who are asked to provide and instantly shout its name: "Lenape" (as the Delawares called themselves). The last and most difficult task for the orator is to elicit a reaction from Tamenund, which he achieves by extolling the past glory of the Delawares and indirectly inviting Tamenund to talk about it. This a superb piece of oratory (349):

"It was the Lenni Lenape," returned Magua, affecting to bend his head in reverence to their former greatness. "It was the tribes of the Lenape! The sun rose from the water that was salt, and set in water that was sweet, and never hid himself from their eyes. But why should I, a Huron of the woods, tell a wise people their own traditions? Why remind them of their injuries; their ancient greatness; their deeds; their glory; their happiness—their losses; their defeats; their misery? Is there not one among them who has seen it all, and who knows it to be true? I have done. My tongue is still, but my ears are open".

Though reluctant and annoyed by Magua's presumptuousness, Tamenund asked Magua to take the captives and go.¹⁹ All things considered, Magua's persuasion worked, and he would have taken them all, had not Uncas, thanks to Cora's pleading with Tamenund, appeared before the assembly and saved the day.

¹⁸ In denouncing the greed and deceit of the white people Magua recalls the figure of the "noble savage" and confirms what Hawk-eye, Chingachgook and Uncas conclude in chapter II of vol. 2 (so McWilliams, Jr. [2009], 141). After all, his confession to Cora (140) reveals that he was talking from experience: "Magua was born a chief and a warrior among the red Hurons of the lakes; he saw the suns of twenty summers make the snows of twenty winters run off in the streams, before he saw a pale-face; and he was happy!" (140).

¹⁹ Tamenund reacts by saying that it's no use talking about the Delawares' past glory, displays his annoyance at the fact that a Huron has come to their home and conducted himself as if "the Mingoes were rulers of the earth", and asks what a Huron's business is with the Delawares. Magua replies: "Justice. His prisoners are with his brothers, and he comes for his own." Tamenund gives his reply "in a low and reluctant voice": "Justice is the law of the Great Manitto. My children, give the stranger food. Then, Huron, take thine own, and depart."

Epigraph to vol. 2, chapter XV

“But plagues shall spread, and funeral fires increase,
Till the great King, without a ransom paid,
To her own Chrysa, send **the black-eyed maid.**” –*Pope*²⁰

Uncas’s appearance saved all the prisoners except for Cora, whom he is obliged to recognize as Magua’s captive.²¹ The Huron departs in triumph taking Cora along, while Uncas and Heyward vow to give chase the next morning. It is later discovered that Cora is hidden in a cave near the Huron village. Hawk-eye forms a plan, the primary aim of which is to release her by defeating the Hurons. Adapted to the context of chapter XV the Iliadic epigraph says in substance that there is only one solution to the prolonged crisis, which is that Cora be allowed to return to her own people. Agamemnon became furious upon hearing from Calchas’ mouth the words of the epigraph and gave Chryseis back only when he received an alternative comparable prize. The reference to Chryseis as “the black-eyed maid” links her directly to the prominently “dark-eyed” and “dark-haired” Cora.²² In contrast to Agamemnon, Magua has made it clear all along that he would have sent Alice back to her own people and even other captives, but never Cora.²³ This modern Agamemnon will not bargain his captive girl for anything else, and the will of Cora and Uncas is unmovable. Death for all three becomes the inevitable conclusion of the frantic chase.²⁴

Conclusion

The Iliadic epigraphs to chapters VII, XII and XV of vol. 2, the only explicit intertextual link of Cooper’s novel with Homer, are all connected with Magua, the “villain” of the novel. Magua has been seen to exercise unquestionable authority among the Indians by means of his power of persuasion and his deep understanding of human nature. Aristotle attached no moral strings to the art of persuasion, and I believe that neither did the narrator of the novel, based on his repeated praise of Magua’s performance as an orator. Magua proves a successful

²⁰ *Il.* 1.122-124 = 1.97-100 “οὐδ’ ὄ γε πρὶν λοιμοῖο βαρείας χεῖρας ἀπώσει / πρὶν γ’ ἀπὸ πατρὶ φίλωι δόμεναι ἐλικώπιδα κούρην / ἀπριάτην ἀνάποινον, ἄγειν θ’ ἱερὴν ἑκατόμβην / ἐς Χρῦσην.”

²¹ Hawk-eye offers himself in place of Cora but his offer is rejected by both Magua and Cora.

²² Differently from Alice who has “fair golden hair, and bright blue eyes”, the eyes of Cora are dark and her hair “shining and black, like the plumage of the raven” (54). She is referred to as “the dark-eyed Cora” (57), “the dark-haired daughter” (139; 142 the dark-haired woman” (142), or simply “the dark hair” (220, 230, 234, 260, 264, 273).

²³ Cf. vol. 1, chapter XI, 147 (Cora to Alice): “Alice,” she said, “the Huron offers us both life –nay, more than both; he offers to restore Duncan –our invaluable Duncan, as well as you, to our friends– to our father– to our heartstricken, childless father, if I will bow down this rebellious, stubborn pride of mine, and consent–”

²⁴ Magua’s forces are defeated in the clash with the Delawares, but he manages to escape with two Hurons. One of them is dragging Cora along and all three reach the mountain through an opening in the cave, pursued by Uncas, Hayward, and Hawk-eye. When Cora, standing on the ledge of a precipice, refuses to go on, Magua offers her an impossible choice, to share his bed or die by his knife. We never find out what he would have done, since at that moment Uncas leaps upon the ledge and one of the Hurons seizes the occasion to stab Cora in the chest while Magua stabs Uncas in the back. Gathering the strength left to him, Uncas kills Cora’s murderer. Soon after Hawk-eye will shoot and kill Magua just as he is about to escape his pursuers once more.

orator not only in the Huron village but also in the community of the Delawares, where he wins a double challenge; to be noted that for his performance in the contest of wits with Hard-heart, the Delawares’ “most approved orator”, Magua is praised by the narrator as a “skilled diplomatist”. His eloquence is exclusively and prominently associated with that of Homeric heroes. Achilles was educated by his tutor Phoenix “to be both a speaker of words and doer of deeds” (μύθων τε ῥητῆρ’ ἔμεναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων), so that he would not be defeated either in warfare or “in the assemblies where men achieve distinction” (*Il.* 9.440-443). Cooper’s Magua has absolutely no match as an orator in Indian assemblies and excels as a warrior by Indian standards— he is killed at the very end, with a bullet from afar at a moment when he is unarmed and is incapable of defending himself or escaping. Magua’s cunning goes hand in hand with his power of persuasion, and if he is a mere “villain”, this characterization would reflect on Odysseus as well. Regardless of anything else, the exclusive association of epigraphs involving Achilles, Agamemnon, and Nestor with Magua suggests that he is the most “Homeric” and probably the only truly “Homeric” character in Cooper’s novel.

Cooper wrote that Walter Scott’s great achievement as a novelist was that “he raised the novel, as near as might be, to the dignity of the epic”.²⁵ One more reason for appreciating what Cooper himself achieved in *The Last of the Mohicans* with regard to the typical novelistic “villain”. McWilliams, Jr. argues, following Joel Porte, that the concluding scene of Cooper’s novel, with the lamentations of the Delaware maidens over the body of Uncas and the climactic short lament of Chingachgook, are “clearly influenced by the twenty-fourth book of the *Iliad*.” He proceeds, however, to make the following clarification: “However similar these endings may be in situation and in spirit, the characters of the mourned heroes differ markedly. Uncas never expresses the epic warrior’s quest for glory or renown; instead, Cooper emphasizes Uncas’s gentleness and grace”.²⁶ Hence, I would add, chapter XVI of vol. 2 bears no Homeric epigraph, because Uncas was not a modern Hector. Instead, the epigraph is derived from Fitz-Greene Halleck’s poem “Marco Bozzaris” (1825), which laments the death of the Greek freedom fighter against the Turks (37-46):

They fought—like brave men, long and well;
They piled that ground with Moslem slain,
They conquered—but Bozzaris fell,
Bleeding at every vein.
His few surviving comrades saw
His smile when rang their proud hurrah,
And the red field was won;
Then saw in death his eyelids close
Calmly, as to a night’s repose,
Like flowers at set of sun.

²⁵ Cooper (1838), 363-364.

²⁶ McWilliams, Jr. (1989), 141-142.

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Περίληψη

Μιχαήλ Πασχάλης

Μάγκουα: ο «ομηρικότερος» χαρακτήρας του *Τελευταίου των Μοϊκανών* του Τζέιμς Φένιμορ Κούπερ

Οι προμετωπίδες-παραθέματα από την ομηρική *Ιλιάδα* στα κεφάλαια 7, 12 και 15 του 2ου τόμου του μυθιστορήματος του Τζέιμς Φένιμορ Κούπερ *Ο τελευταίος των Μοϊκανών* αποτελούν το μοναδικό ρητό τεκμήριο που συνδέει διακειμενικά το μυθιστόρημα με τον Όμηρο. Παρά το γεγονός ότι έχει ερευνηθεί η σχέση του μυθιστορήματος με το έπος και ειδικά με τον Όμηρο, οι εν λόγω προμετωπίδες δεν έχουν μελετηθεί σχεδόν καθόλου. Αντίθετα από ό,τι ίσως θα περίμενε ο αναγνώστης, συνδέουν τον Αχιλλέα, τον Αγαμέμνονα και τον Νέστορα αποκλειστικά με τον «κακό» του μυθιστορήματος, τον Ινδιάνο Μάγκουα της φυλής των Χιούρον, που έχει αποκληθεί και «ενσάρκωση του Σατανά». Δύο από αυτές εντάσσονται στη σύγκρουση του Αχιλλέα με τον Αγαμέμνονα για την τύχη της Χρυσηΐδας και την «ανταλλαγή» της με τη Βρισηΐδα στην αρχή της *Ιλιάδας*. Η σύγκρουση αυτή, με επίκεντρο δύο γυναίκες που έγιναν λάφυρα πολέμου και παλλακίδες μετά την καταστροφή της πατρίδας τους, γίνεται η αφορμή να αποσυρθεί ο Αχιλλέας από τον πόλεμο. Αντίστοιχα, το κεντρικό θέμα του δεύτερου τόμου του *Τελευταίου των Μοϊκανών* είναι η αρπαγή από τον Μάγκουα των δύο θυγατέρων του Συνταγματάρχη Μάνρο μετά τη σφαγή στο οχυρό Ουίλιαμ Χένρι, η αναζήτηση από τους φίλιους ήρωες και ο αγώνας να απελευθερωθούν. Δύο από τους ήρωες αλλά και ο ίδιος ο Μάγκουα τρέφουν ερωτικά αισθήματα για τις κοπέλες. Δεινός ρήτορας χωρίς ανταγωνιστή αλλά και δεινός πολεμιστής, ο Μάγκουα ανακαλεί τον ιδανικό ομηρικό ήρωα «μύθων τε ρητῆρ' ἔμεναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων», ενώ ο συνδυασμός της ρητορικής δεινότητας με την πανουργία ανακαλεί τη μορφή του ομηρικού Οδυσσέα. Έτσι ο Μάγκουα αναδεικνύεται ο «ομηρικότερος» χαρακτήρας του μυθιστορήματος του Κούπερ.