

Discourse of Eco-Concern in James Fenimore Cooper: A Linguistic Analysis of Images in the Deerslayer

Abstract

Cooper has drawn flak from some commentators for using language which few claimed was not in keeping with the Indian tongue, some have said that Indians never spoke in the manner and words which he puts in their mouth is not the way Indians spoke. The paper explores the ecological figurative language and notes all the animal similes, epithets and metaphors.

Keywords: Epithet, Metaphor, Simile, Animal, Violence, James Fenimore Cooper, The Deerslayer.

Introduction

General Lewis Cass has said "this is not the manner in which Indians talk neither is it the manner in which any people talk" (Cass, p. 374), this is highly unfair as has been noted that the figurative language of the Indians far from being a mere figment of his imagination is highly realistic and as his daughter too has seconded, closely modelled on his sources. John Friden has tried to trace the ancestry of Cooper's figurative language and romantic Indians on Scott Fitzferald's Ossian. He says Cooper's "Indian rhetoric is a poetic creation and not the speech of living men." (Friden, p. 55) In contrast John T Fredrick has proved that Cooper has modelled his characters on his sources, (Frederick, 1956) which are Heckwelder who wrote "History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations" and Charlevoix who wrote "The Journal of a Voyage to North America" and John Smith who told the famous Pocahontas story and John Eliot who wrote "A Grammar of the Massachusetts Indian languages" and Cadwallader Colden who wrote "A history of the Five Indian Nations".

All of his images are drawn from the clouds, the mountains, the forest, the diurnal movements, the seasons, the birds, the beasts and the vegetable world. Although it was too early to say but some of the environmental problems like species extinction and bio-diversity loss are predicted in the ideas expressed at the time. Scalping or removing the scalp of a savage was a practise common amongst the tribes in North America but not laudable amongst Christians, but Harry doesn't mind practising it because he can earn a bounty from the Crown just as the the Crown offers bounty for bear's hide and wolfe's ears. (Cooper, p. 528). Pointing to the habit of the government of offering bounty for the skulls of cougars (catamounts), wolves and grizzly bears Terry Glavin says

(Glavin, 2006) says, "In 1694, in Connecticut, a bounty of 20 shillings was offered for every dead catamount(cougar) and in 1695, South Carolina required every surviving aboriginal person in the colony to kill a wolf, a cougar, a bear, two wildcats every year under threat of being subjected to a public whipping. Massachusetts was offering cougar bounties at the astonishing sum of 40 shillings in 1742 ,and ring hunts were common throughout the 13 colonies" (Glavin, p. 139)

So we see a sustained campaign to eliminate these animals. The bison survived because of the sustained efforts of a few but not the passenger pigeon and the Carolina parakeet .It was the only parrot species that made its home solely in North America. It came to be regarded as a pest by farmers and Audubon Society warden, Guy Bradly died trying to protect it. (Glavin, p. 78)

These are the attitudes responsible for mass extinction of species, especially of large carnivores such as cougars (catamounts and panthers) and wolves. Human attitudes are responsible for the species loss which we see today, where an older morality teaches that it is acceptable to shed the blood of animals, while today we realize that clearly it is not acceptable. Leopold gave the example of Odysseus who hanged the slave girls on his return, this was condoned according to the prevalent morality of

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the time but is totally unacceptable in society which espouses liberal values, Leopold asks us to go beyond liberalism which embraces humans and extend these rights to the non-human world, according to this ethic it would be wrong to harm mountains, land, rivers, insects, plants and animals. (Leopold A. , 2003). We realise the blood thirstiness of hunter-gatherer societies when Natty tells that he has killed so many deer but no humans and hence he is named Deerslayer for his fatal and accurate aim, even though he has never killed a human being. (The Deerslayer, p. 522) In his morality this is perfectly acceptable even laudable, although in retrospect it is this out of date morality which is indifferent to the killing of animals as the recent controversy over the meat ban clearly shows, where people objected to the ban on slaughter for even a few days, our new morality should teach us to respect not only endangered species but all species, especially domestic ones.

And again harkening back to the times when wolves were penned the black eyes of the Indian glistened like the balls of the panther or of a penned wolf. (The Deerslayer, p. 637) The fight between March and the Hurons they resemble tigers in a cage. (The Deerslayer, p. 815) Why should tigers be in a cage in the first place? Similitudes such as these show how humans ill-treat the animal species through the ages. In (Cooper, 1985) Hurry says, "Old Tom. . . you look'd amazingly like a tethered bear, as you stretched the hemlock boughs, and I only wonder that you didn't growl more." (The Deerslayer, p. 736)

Time and again we see the human species inflicting pain and damage on the animal and vegetable world. Arne Naess and deep ecologists would have forgiven human killing of animal to satisfy basic vital needs such as hunger. But they believe that humans have no right to lessen or destroy the bio-diversity of the planet for the fulfilment of an ever increasing plethora of wants. Hunter gatherer society can seem cruel at first but was a better practice than raising farm animals in confined spaces, bred specifically for food and skin. Some of the practices of slaughter in so called civilised society come out in this simile. Hurry is captured by the Indians and he is tethered just as a sheep is on its way to slaughter. (The Deerslayer, p. 826) It is this slaughter that Mahavir opposed and was the foremost guru of the Jain sect which opposes violence in all forms especially if it be against mute animals and "lower" life forms.

Early Americans were responsible for the extinction of many species. Already as early as the nineteenth century animals were scarce as they are being treated as game as the Hurry Harry discussing his love for Judith and his love for hunting beavers. As early as the seventeenth century beavers had been wiped out of New England, over-hunted for their fur. Fur traders had a field day killing beavers: Hurry is on the horns of a dilemma, where Judith pulls him in one way, while the beaver pulls in the opposite direction (The Deerslayer, p. 516)

As (Glavin, 2006) puts it, "In a largely forgotten chapter of the urban diet, well into the twentieth century wild game, was a part of

that diet. Venison, wild trout, rabbit, wild goose, prairie chicken, buffalo, wild turkey, snipe, plover and a wide variety of shorebird and duck species were common North American dinner fare. As the abundance of so many game animals dwindled, market hunters turned to the passenger pigeon." (Glavin, p. 76) .

The passenger pigeon was ranked once the most populous bird of the day and yet now it is extinct, a victim of man's greed for game. As game birds became fewer, the hunters attacked the passenger pigeon. The hero says gives us the epicurean side of pioneer Americans. Natty defends the shooting of game in order to put gourmet spread on the table claiming that those who don't shoot have to practise the miserly occupation of being fur trappers or broom and basket makers for whom the tasty morsels of venison, bear ham, or hog ham are a no-no. Such men may sow corn, but will be denied the delicious wild meat. (The Deerslayer, p. 924) Such is the taste for meat in the west fast catching on in India that there is no pure vegetarian meal in France as Teresa told Dr Prassannshu. This meat eating habit has resulted in immense cruelty to farm animals who are denied basic rights because they are considered animals to be eaten, Tom Regan has proposed that the crates which confine them should be opened not widened as the first and important step in their liberation. (Regan, 2003, p. 68) Gourmandizing of this kind by humans has brought about the downfall of other species. The novel abounds in images and similes of the hunt. "The savages are near us, moreover, and the difficulty is, getting out of the river, without being shot down like deer standing at a lick" (The Deerslayer, p. 549) and again fainthearted men are compared to no tailed beaver because the tail was the most savoury part of the beaver. (The Deerslayer, p. 522).

All similes were analysed through COUNTIF and COUNTIFS and the chart is given below. Analysis can be done at two levels firstly subjective analysis which has been done above and secondly an objective analysis was done when one main excel sheet was further subdivided into three smaller sheets and certain statistical analysis was done on them. This was possible using COUNTIF and COUNTIFS certainiles of wolves and hounds abound in the language of the time. According to (Barcott, 2008), "The wolf was to north America a malevolent force roaming the countryside, in the nineteenth and twentieth century the ranchers shot every wolf within reach of a bullet" (Barcott, p. 117). Coopers language abounds in similes and metaphors and proverbs related to wolves. For the persons in the novel the wolf is mostly ferocious, cunning and ruthless in the wild, as such the wolf has suffered from bad press and the red wolf is extinct and the grey wolf has been saved from the brink of extinction which for example the short sighted policies such as by making Grand Canyon a hunting reserve in 1906, the government declared war on the large megafauna by hiring hunters to kill wolves, cougars (catamounts) and coyotes and bobcats. This resulted in an explosion of the deer population from 4000 to 30000 and even

touching 100000, which resulted in starvation and disease amongst the deer, which led to a cruel culling of the deer. (Barcott, p. 117) This example shows the negative consequences of man's interference in Nature. Attitudes of fear and loathing to wolves are very much prevalent in the novel. In this savage world both the English and the French are offering bounties for any scalps of the enemy so Hutter and Hurry unscrupulously decide to go searching for scalps of the women and children of the Huron camp, they are caught, Hurry explains their predicament. They encounter the Hurons who are like wild cats or wolves and they imprison the palefaces like two tethered sheep (The Deerslayer, p. 665), a very biblical imagery of wolves and sheep.

And again the biblical language of deliverance is used to describe their escape from the Hurons (Cooper, 1985) "to celebrate deliverance from a den of wolves." (The Deerslayer, p. 731). So we note that animals which are in close proximity to humans such as dogs and cats are plentiful. Similes on hounds abound and they are likened to the Indians such as, how a hound will not give up on his scent in the hope of finding a prey and neither will an Indian (The Deerslayer, p. 558). The wise old man of the tribe is described in this fashion, Tamenund has penetrating eye sight which doesn't allow anything to pass by and is as sharp as the scent of a hound (The Deerslayer, p. 511). After a skirmish the combatants pause for breath. They are compared to mastiffs or hounds who having indulged their savageries by fighting ruthlessly await a chance to renew them. (The Deerslayer, p. 817).

Earlier in the second chapter Hurry asserts with much vehemence which also reveals a speciesism which is common to most cultures as men regard themselves as infinitely superior to dogs. Hurry's disregard of dogs which he calls curs should come as no surprise to people of any race, culture or religion such contempt is built into our very language structures with animal nouns being used as abusive epithets.

Hurry says he loathes an overly quarrelsome person as he does dogs or curs but is not too punctilious when it comes to fighting or showing flint at the right time. (The Deerslayer, p. 522)

Again the Hurons are compared negatively to howling foxes (Cooper, 1985) So we note similes related to the canine family are the most numerous. Sometimes they are compared to people for their keen scent or sometimes their howls are noted, but unlike our Indian suspicions that howling dogs are a bad omen foretelling death, these are taken in more matter of fact manner here. Mostly their negative characteristics are highlighted in the figurative language. If a tribe has to be spoken in a degrading manner they are said to be howling in pack. (The Deerslayer, p. 910) As are equally common similes related to the feline family. When Judith and Host's bemoan the news of Natty's capture by the Hurons, the limitations of beauty are explained Natty claims that Judith's glamour and grand looks will not change the characteristics of a wolf and make him mild as a squirrel or make a fierce mountain lion as timorous as a fawn. (The Deerslayer, p. 915). When the

Huron's get confused about Natty's race and suspect that he has Indian blood, Natty with no small pride at his white blood denies the accusation and tells him that the Huron is off the mark almost as if he mistook a wolf for catamount. (The Deerslayer, p. 775) On Hurry's fondness for Judith Natty believes that all creatures have a right to their dislikes and preferences here we can find traces of the modern environmental ethic which decries that humans by reducing species have also curtailed the interpersonal relation between species. It is a fact hardly recognised that species interact with one another independent of humans. As when Natty says that anyone can have a fancy including squirrels have a right to make up their mind regarding a catamount. (The Deerslayer, p. 503). Time and again the physical beauty of Hurry is emphasised by comparing him to the most majestic of animals, the lion. (Cooper, 1985) says "And March appeared like a lion at bay". (The Deerslayer, p. 817)

Similes related to deer family or cervidae abound. Deer was an important source of food and its skin was used for multiple uses. The cave paintings of early man are full of depictions of deer. The deer had many uses such as being used for garments and other accessories. On Natty's expertise in tying laces (Cooper, 1985) says Natty can tie his deer thongs laces through his moccasins with as much finesse as a cobbler. (The Deerslayer, p. 870) Soon after the death of Tom Hutter, Hurry claims that the two were made for each other as buckskin fits the wearer if he is reasonably built (The Deerslayer, p. 873) Natty sermonises, unconsciously revealing the over-hunting prevalent at the time, he compares the daily rising of the sun and its setting in the west to relentless pursuit of a deer around his haunt. (The Deerslayer, p. 912) The next simile too is along the same lines laying bare over-hunting in hunter gatherer societies which too is responsible for species loss only second to habitat loss as the main cause for species loss. When Natty is caught by the Hurons, their chief Ravenoak asks sarcastically if Natty thought of himself a buck with tremendous swimming prowess, which swims itself out of difficulty. (The Deerslayer, p. 801) Natty says that experience is a better teacher than schools, inadvertently revealing the over-hunting of the time, claiming that even the fawns wisen up to the tricks of hunters before a single hunting season is over and in much the same way an Indian wisens up to the tricks of white men. (The Deerslayer, p. 863)

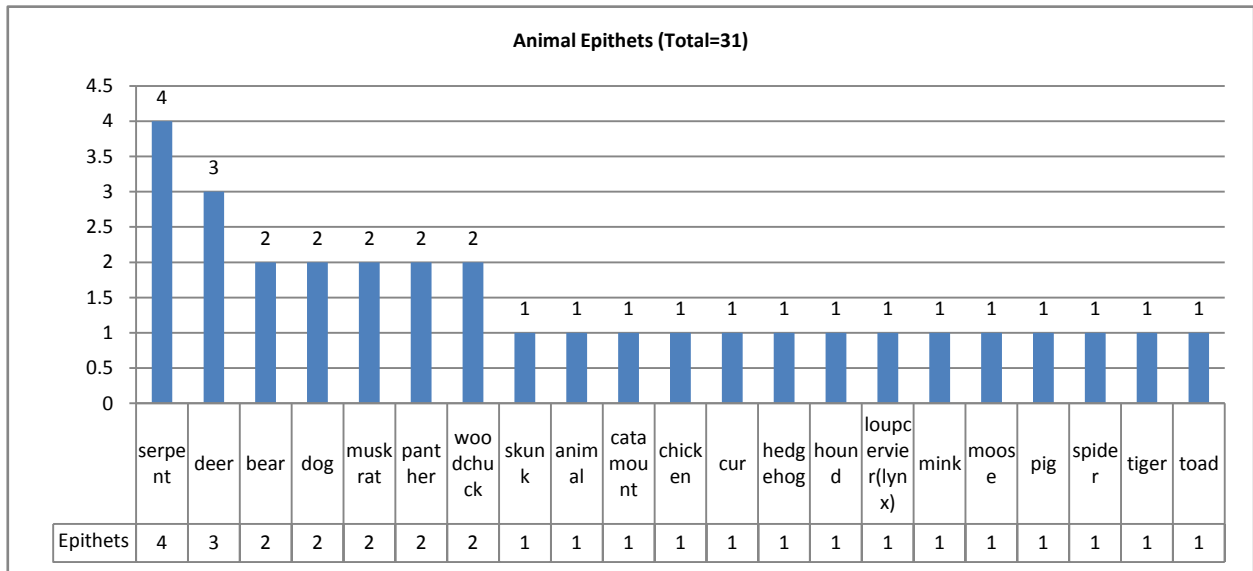
Animal epithets are also common throughout the book. Epithets used by the Indians are like similes related to animals and some commonly used nick names are Deerslayer, Great Serpent, Hawkeye, Muskrat, Panther. While dying the Red warrior acknowledges the palefaces superior marksmanship and superior aim and confers on him the epithet Hawkeye, "No Deerslayer-Hawkeye-Hawkeye-Hawkeye-Shake hand" (The Deerslayer, p. 602) When Sumach (acid berry) curses the Deerslayer for killing her husband and her brother, she reminds him that the Delawares have been declared woman by the rest of the tribes, Delawares suffered a defeat at the hands of the other tribes and subsequently had to accept the ignominious epithet of woman. These curses were common amongst a martial race like the

Red Indians and are all explicit comparisons to women or to animals. Sumach whose womanly pride is hurt when Natty rejects her, she reminds him that his adopted tribe, Delawares have been declared women by the confederation of 6 nations of the Iroquois tribes and hence the Delaware tribes were in shame and Natty has been adopted by petticoated women. Further she points out that no red man will be so unmanly to groan like a hog. These unmanly groans come from a paleface's neck and remind her of the sweet sounds of singing girls. Then she calls him all the animal nouns such as pig, spider, hedgehog, dog, woodchuck toad, mink and finally an Englishman, which too is a form of abuse.

(The Deerslayer, p. 773)

Speciesism (prejudice against animals) is present in the epithets such as when Sumach refers to the Delawares as dogs of the palefaces and banishes them to howl in their own hunting ground. (The Deerslayer, p. 955) 'No Deerslayer-Hawkeye-

Hawkeye-Hawkeye-Shake hand.' (The Deerslayer, p. 602) All epithets are not abusive, some are descriptive in nature. They may be simple descriptions of nature. The house in which Hutter which Hutter lives with his daughters is called Muskrat castle by the gallant officers because like the dwelling of the Muskrat, it too has piles of water flowing beneath it. (The Deerslayer, p. 517)Some are vivid instances of nouns (animals) being used to express bravery or agility associated with the creature in men. Sumach searches in vain for her husband and brother namely the lynx and the panther. She searches for le loupcevier (lynx) and the panther all over in the woods, the clouds and in the lake. (The Deerslayer, p. 975) And sometimes verbs are used, actions associated with these characters which they regularly perform. Le Garcon qui Bondi is French for the bounding boy whose frolicsome actions are expressed by comparison to a hound the circle like hound, or a goat at play." (The Deerslayer, p. 980)



Other than these many animal metaphors abound too. Both the parties insult each other and extol their virtues, Chingachgook, the Great Serpent call themselves wolves and calls the Huron's dogs, claiming that the Mingos or enemies are no wolves but actually dogs who have come to get their ears cropped (The Deerslayer, p. 879)

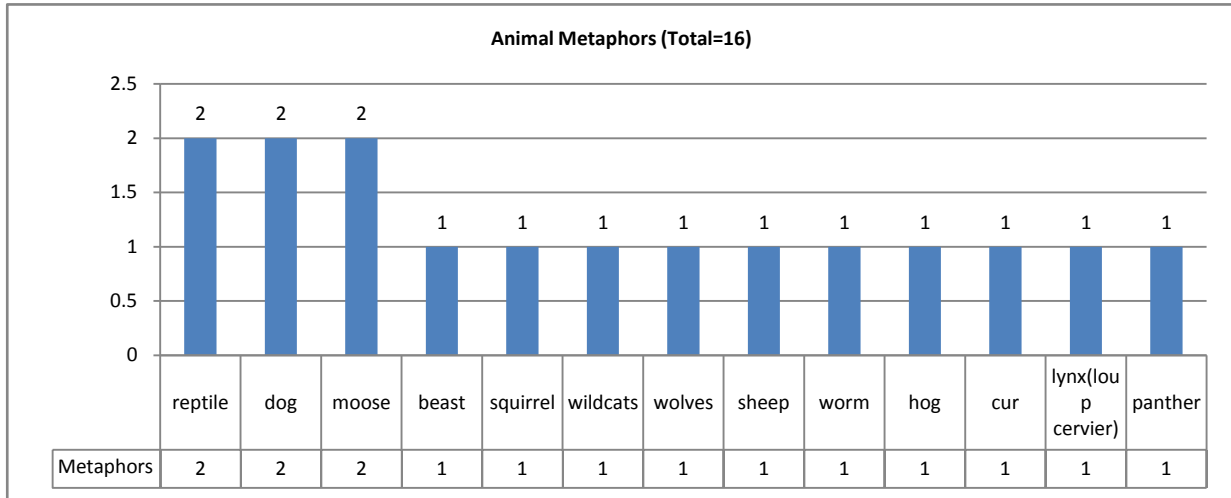
On the dubious character of Tom Hutter is exposed the Hurons speak of him in belittling manner suggesting his opportunism and survival instinct implying a lack of settled values. He is a Muskrat, because he is opportunistic like a rat and amphibious like a muskrat, sometimes in water and sometimes in land, (The Deerslayer, p. 775)Rivenoak catches the paleface Natty he calls him a moose who although long legged is clumsy in water because water is not his element, repeating the earlier imagery of fish out of water going back into the water because it being their natural element (The Deerslayer, p. 640) In much the same way Natty is out of his element in water and hence he is caught there. Many a time the Hurons get a chance to kill Natty but refrain from doing so saying that since he was in water he became a fish and since fish are not killed by bullets but

caught by nets, he too has been captured much the same way, as and when he becomes a moose or land borne and tries to escape with his long moose like legs, he will be treated like a moose or shot like a moose. (The Deerslayer, p. 965).

Hurry while justifying his decision to scalp the so called savages to reptiles and wants to crush the reptiles (Indians) in the egg so that they don't attack them when grow full grown. (Cooper, p. 736). A sentence which reveals not only Harry's antipathy to the Indians, but also his revulsion for reptiles which he regards as lower life forms. Judith's conscience at her past indiscretions with the gallant officers is awakened and her guilty conscience is described as the goading of a worm that never dies (The Deerslayer, p. 854) implying that it is difficult for her to put her past behind her in this novel with Victorian morals, and her past becomes the reason Deerslayer rejects her marriage proposal. Biblical metaphors of the enemy as wolves and the victims as sheep are also common. The Hurons are called Canada wolves and the Delawares are the sheep which may be attacked in their pens when asleep "Deerslayer wonders how many sleepless nights they will have without the wolves

from Canada finding a way back into their (sheep's) pen. (The Deerslayer, p. 716). On the implacable revenge of the Indians, revenge will come as naturally to them as howling comes to a wolf and gluttony comes to a hog (The Deerslayer, p. 911). All

metaphors show the connection between the animal in human nature and reveals the animal in humans. The connections between human and animal are evident for all to see.



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