

Natural Imagery and Nature under Threat in Cooper's the *Deerslayer*

Abstract

The author posits that when Nature disappears so do the many figures of speech such as idioms, metaphors, proverbs, extended similes, conceits, personifications, synecdoche, etc. which freely employ this natural imagery. Cooper who uses the figurative language of the Red Indians in his elegiac *The Deerslayer* is a master in using natural imagery to reinforce his meaning. So a threat to nature translates into a threat to language using natural idiom.

Keywords: Nature, Woods, Flowers, Figurative Language.

Introduction

The Sixth Extinction: Journey among the Lost and Left behind by Terry Glavin who goes on a global journey exploring the history of mankind including colonization comes to conclusion that we are facing the sixth wave of extinction mainly due to human economic activity. He sings a paean to the vanishing birds, languages, turtles, frogs, songs and fruit diversities, he is upset not just at the scale of the phenomena but at the pace at which it is occurring. According to Glavin "Global climate patterns are changing faster than in any period since the Ice Age began to wane 18000 years ago.....and suddenly we are taking all to ourselves almost 40 percent of the earth's primary productivity in the plants we eat, the plants we feed our animals to eat, and the forest we raze to build our cities and our homes." Pg 11 He derides the cultivation of single crop or monoculture which gives to rise of sameness throughout the world, a world where diversity suffers be it diversity in crops, or wild plants or diversity in species and diversity in languages. Beth Ann Fennelly in her paper "Fruits We'll Never Taste, Languages we'll never Hear: The need for Needless complexity," believes in the connection between natural biological diversity and expressions of human culture such as language and food variety.

Aim of the Study

Accordingly the disappearing of variety in food plants and the disappearance of languages are two faces of the same coin, as variety around us decreases so do the names of these fruits and crops resulting in a less complicated and less rich idiom.

The Deerslayer is full of references to woods, forests and the plant life therein. Similes related to trees abound in the novel. Cooper says the leaves of the trees were numerous and they covered the boughs like clouds which cover a sky during a storm (*The Deerslayer* 635). Discussing the teachings in the Bible the verses are compared to seeds which may grow into large trees if scattered. Lawns are rare in virgin forests. Because these forests were untouched by Red Indians and whites, they are called virginal or pristine. Judith's beauty is known through riven trees, rocks and eagle's old nests (776). In other words just as naturalists know of these so do highway border men know of Judith's beauty. Cooper time and again declares his preference for wilderness over towns. Commenting on the charm of Glimmerglass and its surrounding mountain, the lake is smooth as glass covered with pure pine clad mountain air. Tree simile are common, Hurry stands as still as a pine on the hill. Another tall pine is described thus that its leaves and boughs hang like a canopy to Red Indian forest chief during the unknown past when this great continent was unknown and undiscovered its past unrecorded to history. The Huron tribe exulting in the capture of their prisoner claim that their prisoner is tall as a pine, strong as a moose, active as a deer and fierce as a panther. When Hurry is imprisoned and tied up, Natty exclaims that he looks like a girdled pine in an area cleared of trees and just like a lone pine he is rocking in the tempest more than he would have done if he was in a crowd of trees.(730). On the journey to the lake, Glimmerglass Hurry and Natty notice that they are surrounded by trees especially beeches and hemlock, and Natty notes how the trees incline to one another as lovingly as brothers and in fact

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more loving than brothers who may fight tooth and nail.(510). Sumach on the death of her husband and brother calls Natty a cruel paleface .And reiterates that they were blameless. She extols their hunting capacity and bemoans that their lives were cut off in their prime when the Great Spirit had intended that these warriors live till a ripe old age and die like shriveled branches of hemlock which fall under their own weight.(975)Judith on sensing danger trembles like an aspen, which is a frail tree. Indian nicknames are expressive and all related to nature, Judith is the Wild Rose, her sister is the Drooping Lily. The brave Huron is called a Rivenoak suggesting an oak cleft in two. Hist berating Hurry for his indiscriminate killing of an Indian girl asks him how he would have felt if his wife had been killed in this callous manner and who would pity him on the demise of his mother or sister, they would say that it served him right for killing a young Indian girl. She calls him a big pine who fell on a slender birch tree and crushed her.(803) Another colourful Indian name is Briarthorn,which is a thorny bush. The whole earth looks as if it is clothed in a gala dress of leaves (515).Women are usually named after flowers to complement their looks, Hetty is called Honeysuckle a yellow coloured flower. Le Sumach is the wife of lynx is acidic berry. Her brother is shot by Natty or hawkeye in acknowledgement of his superior marksmanship. Rivenoak struck by Judith's beauty implores her calling the "flower of the woods" to speak, saying that she should get first preference to speak and if her words are as sweet sounding and intelligible as her good looks they will never leave the ears of Rivenoak long after the Canada winters have snowed on all the flowers of summer.

There plenty of figures of speech related to Natural, Geographical and Celestial bodies in the novel. As such many personifications and instances of what has been termed derogatorily as pathetic fallacy exist. Pathetic fallacy has been explained as the delusion of writers to find pathos and feeling in animal and plant life, but recent experiments have conclusively proved that animals too have a rich emotional life, and writer and poets who deployed pathetic fallacy were not so wrong after all. The forest are time and again described as gloomy so we imagine a time when electricity was unheard of and the mountains were shadowing the lake or the basin nearly from all sides. (The Deerslayer, p. 639), the dark sky is called the vault of heaven and its opaqueness is called a gloomy wall (The Deerslayer, p. 740). Deerslayer extolling the virtues of living in the woods claims that they provide ample air, water, space and light which no mansion does, the wind rows in the lake and the streams in the forest will provide these amply (The Deerslayer, p. 745). The forest is cast in a funeral light all the Hurons are gathered in the camp, some carrying torches of fat pine, which serve as torches to a strong but funeral light on from the arches to the bottom and far and wide in the forest (The Deerslayer, p. 798). Many of the personifications have an elegiac tone. But the most striking feature of the scenery at the lake was its air of placidity and repose which is at times called solemn and sombre..., the lake has a mirror or glass

like smoothness together with, the vault of heaven or the sky seems to present greenery at its densest and darkest, one unvaried hue of unbroken verdure. This is called the triumph of vegetation over the locale; nature rubs in its triumph by the trees hanging over the lake. (The Deerslayer, p. 515)...In short Cooper repeats that the hand of man has not yet defaced or deformed this beautiful scene which ties up with the image of the forest as a virgin who has been deflowered but here the forest is still safe from the rapacious hands of man which bathes beneath the sunlight, the scene is a glorious picture. The oxymoron used by Cooper affluent forest grandeur, and the warmth and humidity of a June month which is contrasted by the breadth of the lake water (The Deerslayer, pp. 513-4). Sometimes the brook is personified as brawling its way to the lake (The Deerslayer, p. 653). This is a paradise all right but a paradise threatened by man who is the destructive element, threatening to overthrow this paradise. The elegiac writing goes on describing the hues of the evening after the sun is setting casting long shadows within the woods which are both gloomy and sombre (The Deerslayer, p. 554). The stars are personified as is the loon. The canoes were moving in one direction and the stars look thoughtful and sparkle in their glory which is mild and not too bright unlike that of artificial lights the lights found in nature are usually milder and less garish than artificial lighting and the mountains too seem dignified, calm and gloomy and the darkness is so full that one would imagine that the sun never shone here and the winds never troubled these mountains it is so still. In such a calm still night the loon cries out tremulously (The Deerslayer, p. 590). In these we see a personification of the wind also. The elegiac tone continues and Cooper describing the dawn calls it the twilight hour when the two colours are fighting for supremacy but neither prevails. It is neither gloomy as darkness nor is it brilliantly sunny. The hue of the sky causes the objects to seem almost unearthly and Cooper calls them holy, and sacred, preferring it to the rest of the twenty-four hours. He says that evening although it has been eulogised by thousands of poets is not as beautiful as half an hour of dawn and neither can inspire far reaching or sublime thoughts. Contrasting the two morning and evening he claims in the one case that is dawn the panorama or view is hidden from the eye, while in the other the panorama or view which is in front of the eye slowly starts fading away, but for the morning it is like an unfolding picture which is dim and foggy and has a dark background but slowly starts emerging, the charm of this he calls witchery implying something magical the light increases proportionately it is a moment which is vastly different from the evening twilight which is marked by decreasing or lessening light, and finally the sun is out but a mellow sun not a brilliant one and this he calls as "the great centre of light which becomes slowly distinct and diffuses its luminosity into the atmosphere" (The Deerslayer, p. 805). A description of the vastness of the wilderness is given when we find that the wilderness is interminable or without interruptions in those early days when the Lewis and Clarke expedition crossed

the continent from the east coast of the Hudson to the western shores of the Pacific ocean (The Deerslayer, p. 1005). The wilderness is described thus that the broad belts of virgin wilderness were...boundless and gave good forest cover to the native warrior who with his noiseless moccasins was able to tread on a secret bloody warfare (The Deerslayer, p. 496). On nature following its course Cooper believes that the wind will blow and the tempest will howl as God pleases; Most times unpredictably sometimes at one season which may be the hurricane season sometimes at another which may not be the hurricane season. . . and the loon speak according to their nature (The Deerslayer, p. 611). We see science of meteorology or weather predictions plays a part in the de-sacralisation and hence ill treatment of Nature in the modern world. Personification of the sun, the sun is like the buck which is hunted around its haunt so too the sun sets in the west and like the hunted buck goes around in a circle and comes back to rise in the east (The Deerslayer, p. 912). The novel repeats its elegiac note. The evening star or Venus is the star that Hist chooses to guide her on her path and the silence is such that one would imagine that the quiet of Nature had never been disturbed by the fruitless labour of man (The Deerslayer, p. 1019). After the action of the novel is over when so many Hurons have been massacred the novel ends on a sad note, the victors go back to the lake after twenty years or so and find that things are unchanged, the sun is setting when they reach the lake, the river is rushing through the trees to the lake, the rock which is shaped like a beehive or haycock is still being washed by action of water on it and pine clad mountains too stand in much the same way as it has done so for countless years looking dark and mysterious (The Deerslayer, p. 1028). The passions of man are set against this eternal background and give the reader consolation that even though the characters have not had fulfilment at least the beauty of the place itself is untarnished even though it is threatened by the forces of progress and development, which will spoil it forever.

Oxymorons such as 'gloomy grandeur' and 'forest grandeur' are used, the trees, the noble oaks and pine which have been heated up for centuries their roots are untouched by the heat and light of the sun rays and there is a gloomy grandeur in the shades beneath (The Deerslayer, p. 497). "...The forest paint a picture of affluent forest grandeur" (The Deerslayer, p. 515). When Chingachgook is expected to wash off all his Indian war paint and adorn the western clothes all complete with a hat and pretends to be civilized he acquires what the missionaries call an uncivilized sort of civilization (The Deerslayer, p. 679).

Idioms are common for example Hurry declares that he is on the horns of a dilemma when he tells Natty how Jude pulls him in one way and the beaver in the other (The Deerslayer, p. 516). Hurry suggests to Natty that while he can fish and hunt the deer for survival to keep body and soul together, a very common idiom. (The Deerslayer, p. 522). Natty says that if Judith met a gallant man who had a

smooth brow as if God hadn't ordained that man must live by the sweat of brow would she choose him or Natty (The Deerslayer, p. 904). This is another biblical idiom. The lake is time and again called a sheet of water and the forest is like a gladiator's arena of blood and strife (The Deerslayer, p. 621). Then again it is said that water makes no trail and again smoke coming out of a rifle are called clouds of smoke (The Deerslayer, p. 828).

Alliterations are common also, such as Honeysuckle of the Hills and Wren of the Woods (The Deerslayer, p. 910). Some of these alliterations are commonly used, such as the description of a wilderness, as the soothing and sublime solitude of the woods is alliteration (The Deerslayer, p. 533). For Hetty when she runs away from the comfort of her home to search for her father, Hetty is not too scared of the lonely and dark woods. For her the sublimity of the solitude was soothing, and not appalling (The Deerslayer, p. 649).

Hyperboles are common too, Natty expresses a desire to banish all men if they should cut trees for no substantial reason and he clams hyperbolically that these perpetrators should be banished where there were no four footed animal ever trod the truth being proclaimed in this hyperbole is that man needs animal and if earth were devoid of animals it would be a banishment from paradise just like the original fall of man (The Deerslayer, pp. 516-7). Sumach making fun of the Delawares who were declared women after they lost the battle by the confederacy of six nations and she declares hyperbolically that even the deer are not scared of them and walk when they hear them coming (The Deerslayer, p. 746). Rivenoak struck by Judith's looks gives her first chance to speak because of her superior beauty and imagines her words never leaving his ears because if her words be equal to her looks so they will never leave the ears of Rivenoak. He shall hear them long after the winters have frozen all the lakes and killed all the flowers in Canada, he shall hear them endlessly resounding in his ears (The Deerslayer, p. 992).

Proverbs related to wolves and sheep are common. The biblical proverb of wolves and sheep is used extensively the wolves are the Canada inhabitants who are always on the prowl to eat up the Delaware sheep who are sleeping unaware in their pens (The Deerslayer, p. 716). Old Tom Hutter and Hurry were thinking that they would easily capture the Huron women and scalp them but like sheep that are set on by wolves they are pinned down and tethered by the Hurons (The Deerslayer, p. 665).

Antithesis is used often, antithesis between wolves and sheep between reason and heart between the city and the woods. Hetty prefers the woods and Judith prefers the towns, although she is willing to give up the towns to be queen of the woods if Natty would be her king, a proposal rejected by Natty who prejudiced against her past rejects her. Time and again towns and wilderness are contrasted and time and again reason and the heart is contrasted. And this antithesis is repeated often. Natty tells Judith hinting at her resourcefulness which suits the woods and her

inclinations which is attuned to town life (The Deerslayer, p. 570).

Synecdoche and metonymy are used often. In these figures of speech the part stands for the whole for example the hand stands for the agency of either Nature or God or man. When Nature's superiority over mans is to be shown then Natty is perplexed by the co-existence of forts and churches in towns because if forts stand for wars then churches for peace, so he prefers the wilderness which he calls arbours built by the hand of nature (The Deerslayer, p. 745). The hand of man is usually used negatively as spoiling the pristine beauty of the place "...the hand of man had not yet defaced, or deformed this native place" (The Deerslayer, pp. 513-4). Implying that, the despoiling by man will almost certainly follow. Only once is the hand of man used positively when Natty discovers that man has played a gardener and given a crooked sapling the support of a bass tree to grow and flourish (The Deerslayer, p. 510). Natty advising husband and wife to overcome cloudy days or marital strife by keeping the windows of the heart open which will allow sunshine to enter. In other words they should keep an open mind to resolve all problems which may occur between them (The Deerslayer, p. 835). This is another example of metonymy where window of heart stands for open-mindedness.

Extended similes are used: Just as the fawns get to know the tricks of hunters before a single season is up so an Indian's eyes once opened are never shut to circumvention, and the simile extends itself talks about experience hence being a better teacher than books (The Deerslayer, p. 863). And again the idea that wolves don the fleece of sheep to fool the sheep is extended when the idea comes up that sheep's fleece would be too hot a jacket for a wolf in summer, further extended to conclude that sin and hypocrisy are hot jackets for sinners (The Deerslayer, p. 920).

Conceit is used to imply that the fame of Judith's beauty spread through borderers, highway men, through riven trees and old and abandoned eagle's nests. (The Deerslayer, p. 776). Rivenoak uses irony when he catches Natty trying to swim unsuccessfully through the lake, he says that Natty is a moose for his long legs have given the Huron

warriors' trouble escaping them and since fish are caught through nets and not shot, no bullets will be used against him. Earlier Rivenoak offered him a warm fire to dry himself that even Huron warmth will be welcome to a Delaware hearted man (The Deerslayer, p. 774).

Euphemism is used to express a very important fact towards the end of the novel, that Hist, the Helen of Troy whose capture by the Hurons motivated Chingachgook and Natty to start on their first warpath has died. After about twenty years the warriors revisit the lake but now they are three men, Chingachgook, his son, Uncas and Natty. Cooper informs us that Hist already slept beneath the pines (The Deerslayer, p. 1028).

Conclusion

In this way we come to the conclusion that with the loss of trees, flora, fauna, birds, wild animals degrades not only the ecosystem but also the language also poorer as the less we see of pine, trees, hemlock branches, leaves, honeysuckle, lilies, wild roses, panthers, wolves, hawks the less we will use them in our day today language and hence making these idioms and figures of speech uncommon and endangered.

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