

James Fenimore Cooper was born on September 15, 1789 in Burlington, New Jersey. He was the son of William and Elizabeth (Fenimore) Cooper, the twelfth of thirteen children (Long, p. 9). Cooper is known as one of the first great American novelists, in many ways because he was the first American writer to gain international followers of his writing. In addition, he was perhaps the first novelist to "demonstrate...that native materials could inspire significant imaginative writing" (p. 13). In addition his writing, specifically *The Deerslayer*, present a unique view of the Native American's experiences and situation. Many critics, for example, argue that *The Deerslayer* presents a moral opinion about what occurred in the lives of the American Indians.

Marius Bewley has said that the book shows moral values throughout the context of it. He says that from the very beginning, this is symbolically made clear. The plot is a platform for the development of moral themes. The first contact the reader has with people in the book is in the passage in which the two hunters find each other. "The calls were in different tones, evidently proceeding from two men who had lost their way, and were searching in different directions for their path" (Cooper, p. 5). Bewley states that this meeting is symbolic of losing one's way morally, and then attempting to find it again through different paths. Says Bewley, "when the two men emerge from the forest into the little clearing we are face to face with... two opposing moral visions of life which are embodied in these two woodsmen" (cited in Long, p. 121).

Critic Donald Davie, however, disagrees. His contention is that the plot is poorly developed. "It does not hang together; has no internal logic; one incident does not rise out of another" (cited in Long, p. 121). But according to Robert Long, Bewley has a better grasp of the meaning and presentation of ideas throughout the book. According to Long, although the plot development may not be "strictly linear," it is still certainly coherent and makes sense. In addition, Long feels that, as Bewley states, the novel is a way in and through which Cooper presents moral ideas about the plight of the Native Americans (p. 121).

The story of *The Deerslayer* is simple. It is novel which tells the events which occur in the travels of a frontiersman. His name is Natty, and he is a young man at only twenty years old. Coming from New York of the eighteenth century, he is unprepared in many ways for what he encounters in the frontier. But he survives, escapes, and learns many things over the course of his adventures.

The two characters of Natty and Hurry are contrasted in such a way that Cooper presents his view of the Native Americans through them. As earlier indicated, they symbolize two men with differing moral aptitudes. Throughout the novel, the differences between the two show Cooper's feelings about morality as it relates to the American Indians. As Long states, "The voices of the two men calling to one another at the beginning introduces the idea of a world that has lost its coherence, is already reduced to disjunction and fragmentation. Natty and Hurry search for a point of contact yet move in different directions" (p. 122).

Cooper's descriptions of Natty and Hurry early in the novel make it obvious that they stand for opposite moral values. Hurry, for example, is described by Cooper as having "a dashing, reckless, off-hand manner, and physical restlessness" (Cooper, p. 6). In fact, it is these characteristics of him that gave him his nickname by which he is called - Hurry Scurry, although his real name is Henry March. He is described as tall and muscular, the "grandeur that pervaded such a noble physique" being the only thing that kept him from looking "altogether vulgar" (p. 6). *The Deerslayer's* appearance, on the other hand, contrasts with Hurry's significantly. Cooper indicates that not only were the two men different in appearance, but also "in character" (p. 6). A little shorter than Hurry, he was also leaner. In addition, he was not handsome like Hurry and, says Cooper, he would not have anything exceptional about his looks had it not been for "an expression that seldom failed to win upon those who had leisure to examine it, and to yield to the feelings of confidence it created. This expression was simply that of guileless truth, sustained by an earnestness of purpose, and a sincerity of

feeling" (p. 6).

Cooper contrasts these two characters early in the story so that it is evident that they will provide examples of contrasting behavior as well. It is made clear early on that the later actions of both Hurry and the Deerslayer will contrast in such a way that the moral issues with which Cooper was concerned would come to light.

Glimmerglass as the setting of the novel allows the contrast between the two men to be seen even more strongly. As William P. Kelly (1983) states, the setting created by Cooper allows the story to have a certain myth-like quality, a quality which makes the teaching of a lesson by Cooper all that much more acceptable. "Cooper does not locate his narrative within the flux of history, but evokes a sense of timelessness consistent with the world of myth. For example, the setting is of "the earliest days of colonial history," a "remote and obscure" period, lost in the "mists of time." In setting the backdrop of the story in this way, the events become less important in regards to historical value and accuracy - their importance is derived from their ability to teach one lessons about morality. Within this setting, then, the contrasts between Natty and Hurry are brought across even clearer. But it is another character, Tom Hutter, who also plays an important role in Cooper's presentation of the Indians. Hutter's significance first involves where he lives. His house is located directly in the center of Glimmerglass. This suggests, symbolically at least, that he is involved in the center of activities, whether moral or immoral, within Glimmerglass. In addition, more than living in the center of the land, Hutter has also laid claim, however unofficial, to the land. Early on in the novel the reader learns that this is the case. Shortly after Natty and Hurry meet up, they are canoeing down the water. Natty comments that the land is so beautiful, and asks Hurry, "Do you say, Hurry, that there is no man who calls himself lawful owner of all these glories?" (p. 22). To this Hurry responds, "None but the King....but he has gone so far away that his claim will never trouble old Tom Hutter, who has got possession, and is like to keep it as long as his life lasts" (p. 22).

In having the characters of Natty and Hurry speak of Hutter like this, referring to him in an almost mythological sense as though he is a legend, Cooper is setting the stage for the development of Hutter's character, also in contrast to Natty's. It is in Tom Hutter's home, when Natty and Hurry first arrive in the beginning of the book, that they begin to talk about hunting and the killing of both animals and men. Natty comments that he has the reputation as being the only man "who had shed so much blood of animals that had not shed the blood of man" (p. 28). He says this with pride, obviously not looking with high regard upon the savage slaughter of other men. But Hurry's response shows that he looks at this in a totally different perspective. He says that he is afraid that people will think that Natty is "chicken-hearted." Then he goes on to comment that "For my part I account game, a redskin, and a Frenchman as pretty much the same thing...one has no need to be over-scrupulous when it's the right time to show the flint" (p. 28).

Cooper presents this dialogue between Natty and Hurry in order to obviously contrast their moral characters. First, he has Natty speak, with apparent pride, about the fact that in all the land, he has the reputation for killing more deer than anyone else, while never having taken one single human life. But Hurry's response to this is that Natty is a "chicken-hearted" individual. In Natty's point of view, animals, Indians, and Frenchman are all the same, and killing one is the same as killing another.

In this, Cooper is clearly presenting a view about the worth of Indians within the society of this time. Natty's view that killing other men should be avoided is the correct and "right" view. He sets Natty up as a moral character, specifically in comparison to Hurry to which he compares Natty often. Hurry, then, blatantly states that he thinks that there is nothing which separates the killing of a deer from the killing of a man. Cooper presents this view in order to show what he feels is the correct way. It is obvious that Cooper wants Natty to present Cooper's view of the Native Americans. Natty's inability to look at them as mere animals shows that he believes that they are good people, just the same as anyone

else. In fact, Hurry is depicted more as the villain, while Natty is presented as the hero.

As their conversation continues, Natty asks Hurry if the lake has a name. When Hurry tells him that it, in fact, does not, Natty thinks of this as positive. "I'm glad it has no name, or, at least, no paleface name; for their christenings always foretell waste and destruction" (p. 30). Here, we can see Natty's thoughts on the significance of whether an Indian or a white man has named the water. He comments that he would mind if a white man had named it. He believes that white men traditionally bring with them environmental damage - they would have ruined the natural beauty of it. The Indians, on the other hand, treated land with much more respect. Cooper makes it apparent that this is the way he feels in having Natty comment on the land as such.

Hurry, however, responds in a different way. He tells Natty that the Indian name for it is "Glimmerglass." Then he goes on to state that the white men decided to keep this name, at least unofficially. "I am glad they've been compelled to keep the redmen's name, for it would be too hard to rob them of both land and name!" (p. 30).

In other words, Hurry is stating the obvious fact that everything will eventually be taken away from the Native Americans. Any land that they might value and care for today will be confiscated and fought for by the white men tomorrow. But the exclamation point at the end of the sentence suggests that, rather than a sad comment accepting the inevitable, Hurry says this with glee and excitement. To him it is like a joke, that the Indians will be allowed to keep the name for the land but lose the land itself.

Cooper, in the above dialogue between Natty and Hurry, is presenting a view of the immorality involved in the interactions between the Native Americans and the white men. In Cooper's mind, the Native Americans respected and cared for the land much more than the white men did. This is apparent in his quote from Hurry, that white men always brought "waste and destruction" to land. Secondly, Cooper also thought that the constant fighting, oppression, and killing of the American Indians was wrong. To Cooper, Natty represented the good and moral point of view on this issue, while Hurry represented the immoral and cruel side, laughing about the horrible truths of the land.

All throughout the book *The Deerslayer*, Cooper contrasts the characters of Hurry and Natty in order to present his views of Native Americans. With Hurry as the one who has a racist attitude, believing that the deaths of Indians are deaths which do not matter, Natty is the moral one. The contrast between these two characters allows Cooper to show the contrast between morality and immorality. Hurry goes around killing Indians, believing that their deaths are insignificant. Natty, killing his first Indian in a matter of self-defense, holds the man in his arms as he dies feeling a sense of bonding and brotherhood with the dying Indian. Throughout the book, Natty is shown learning many different things, such as woodcraft, and increasing in moral stature. Hurry, on the other hand, is presented as becoming more and more selfish, until his comments by themselves reveal his ignorance and he loses credibility as a character.

The book *The Deerslayer* is a story in which James Fenimore Cooper presents a view of the Native Americans. His idea is that they were natural owners to the land, being there first. In addition, they loved, valued and respected the land in a way that was not common to most white men. Finally, he believed that they were human beings, entitled to live their lives freely just as anyone else. In showing the two sides of opinion on this issue - Hurry and Natty - Cooper sets the book up as a story of good and evil, right and wrong. His ideas, through the thoughts and actions of Hurry and Natty, are clearly presented.

Works Cited

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