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# Pictorial Space as Identity in *The Deerslayer*

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WHEN *Deerslayer* first meets Hetty Hutter, they exchange information about their identities:

"Yes, I'm Hetty Hutter...Judith Hutter's sister; and Thomas Hutter's youngest daughter."

"I know your history, then, for Hurry Harry talks considerable..." (544-45).

If *Deerslayer* quickly understands the simple Hetty, the young woman has a more difficult time comprehending who he is: "Tell me your names and maybe I'll tell you your character," she says tentatively. But his Christian name, Natty Bumppo, and his several Indian names, Straight-tongue, The Pigeon, Lap-ear, and *Deerslayer*, give neither Hetty nor the reader full insight into his identity. In this, the last-written Leatherstocking tale, James Fenimore Cooper faced an especially difficult problem defining his hero. Here, as in the earlier tales, that hero has no social identity. Outside the Indian culture where he was raised and the white culture where he was born, *Deerslayer* is without an identifiable history or past. Nor in an initiation novel can the hero be introduced with a mature identity. This novel is a "study," Cooper writes in his Preface, for the later "pictures, of his [Leather-stockings] life" (485). The Indian names he has earned bespeak his potential, not his prowess as a warrior. Yet in another sense this uninitiated hero enters the text with a mature identity, one that is literary, already familiar to Cooper's readers. The author's challenge was to create a suspenseful narrative about the development of a familiar character, to place new wine in old bottles. That he recognized the problem is clear in his Preface to the series, when he regrets the scant attention paid his last-written Leatherstocking novel: "There was no longer novelty to attract attention, and the interest was materially impaired by the manner in which events were necessarily anticipated, in laying the last of the series first before the world" (490). If the early audience slighted these two texts, however, later readers have not, for in *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* Cooper fully solves problems of artistic

interest -- no matter in what order the novels are read. In *The Deerslayer* Cooper generates interest by examining the problem itself, the formation of an heroic identity: first, he focuses sharply on the internal as well as the external conflicts; second, he carefully sketches the initiatory process in a setting that corresponds to the hero's expanding self-awareness, so that the reader understands Deerslayer's ethics and expertise within the terrible beauty of this setting. Previous studies have noted the loveliness and complexity of this pristine landscape.<sup>1</sup> I will show that in *The Deerslayer*, where we find Cooper's most precisely rendered series of pictures, the hero fully defines himself within a landscape of pictorial and spatial contrast. Hetty Hutter, as well as the reader, must see him there to comprehend his character.

To achieve manhood, Deerslayer, like the Green Knight, must overcome the enemy in two guises. Hostile Indians challenge his physical prowess while Judith Hutter tests his moral rectitude. Deerslayer's is a two-faceted initiation that Cooper envisions as counterpoised patterns of spatial movement. In confronting his Indian enemies, the hero moves outward from enclosed areas into the space of action, the forest. In the pictorial and symbolic interplay between circumscribed spaces -- most notably the lake -- and the forest-lined shore, Cooper stages Deerslayer's rite of passage from the novice who is initially identified with enclosures to the mature Hawkeye who stalks confidently into the wilderness. Counterpoised with this visual movement outward onto the shore is an equally significant movement inward, as Deerslayer enters Hutter's cabin and is repeatedly "exposed to these dangerous assailants," Judith's "manner, voice, accents, thoughts and acts" (7~2). More fully than in any other Leatherstocking novel, the hero must acknowledge the claims of interior space when Judith focuses his attention on her love and her own search for maturity. Movement inward tests Deerslayer's moral commitments. I will first discuss the complex visual patterns associated with Deerslayer's movement into the space of action, and then examine his corresponding movement inward, to the space of intimacy that is Judith's.

The richly suggestive opening chapter introduces the principle of contrast that is so important in the novel, a principle that informs its social and moral dimensions and, as I shall discuss, its natural and psychological ones as well.<sup>2</sup> Cooper first envisions these tensions visually. The opening description of the natural scene is contrapuntal:

Whatever may be the changes produced by man, the eternal round of the seasons is unbroken. Summer and winter, seed time and harvest, return in their stated order, with a sublime precision, affording to man one of the noblest of all the occasions he enjoys of proving the high powers of his far reaching mind, in compassing the laws that control their exact uniformity, and in calculating their never ending revolutions. Centuries of summer suns had warmed the tops of the same noble oaks and pines, sending their heats even to the tenacious roots, when voices were heard calling to each other, in the depths of a forest, of which the leafy surface lay bathed in the brilliant light of a cloudless day in June, while the trunks of the trees rose in gloomy grandeur in the shades beneath. The calls were in different tones.... (496-97)

These sentences suggest that contrast is inherent in nature and in man. Cooper pairs opposing seasons, summer and winter, spring and fall, as he contrasts the brightly-lit tree tops with the dark forest beneath. Such natural oppositions inform this text, where lake and forest, light and dark, are repeatedly contrasted and yet repeatedly described together, in a single vision, as Donald Ringe observes (110). *Concordia discors* emerges from an appreciation of contrasting values. Furthermore, the passage also juxtaposes nature's permanence and man's transience. In each sentence the main clause expresses the idea of natural succession and order, while the dependent clauses and phrases appropriately articulate man's subordinate concerns.

Cooper lends authority to the eternal as opposed to the temporal, a contrast that explains the "different tones" of *Hurry* and *Deerslayer*. The handsome *Hurry* seeks only the surface of experience: he gazes at his own face mirrored in streams; thinks "more of the beauties of *Judith Hutter*, than of those of the *Glimmerglass*, and its accompanying scenery" (526); and argues that the different complexions of Indians and whites signify a difference in species. *Hurry*, like *Tom Hutter*, is defined by his single-minded and superficial vision, while *Deerslayer*, who comprehends the eternal in nature, embraces the harmony inherent in contrast. Fascinated by the sight of his first lake, *Deerslayer* later tells *Hurry* that "The lake seems made to let us get an insight into the noble forests; and land and water, alike, stand in the beauty of God's Providence!" (515). A character ennobled by a spirit that recognizes God in nature, *Deerslayer* is a man nevertheless; he is a moral paragon who enters the book encumbered by *Hurry Harry's* presence. *Deerslayer* must learn to act in the "subordinate" sphere of human concerns, as first defined by *Hurry Harry*. Repeatedly, he must confront the dangers lurking in the dark forests.

The spatial patterns that inform *Deerslayer's* outward movement are set in the first chapter, as he and *Hurry Harry* emerge from the forest into the clearing. Lost in forest "depths" and "gloomy grandeur," indeed, stumbling through the "tangled labyrinth of a small swamp" (497), the two call to one another. Whereas *Natty Bumppo* steps nobly into the other *Leatherstocking* tales, he here walks in confusion, a peculiar state for the character who always misses the offending twig. This opening chapter introduces a hero who has literally not yet found his bearings, who is self-consciously a novice. His first action is a "hurried adjustment of his arms and disordered dress" (497). His first words, "Do you know this spot?" betray his ignorance of the terrain. And the author's initial description depicts a man whose "frame was comparatively light and slender, showing muscles, however, that promised unusual agility, if not unusual strength" (498). Throughout the opening debate with *Hurry Harry*, *Deerslayer* repeatedly admits his own inexperience as *Hurry* repeatedly challenges his abilities and his "manhood." The forests, here associated with gloom and uncertainty, with *Hurry's* presence as a trapper, later with his Indian adversaries, pose a threat to the novice.

The clearing takes on a different meaning, as *Daniel Peck* has argued (72-77). When "liberated" in the "opening" *Hurry* and *Deerslayer* simultaneously see "day-light" and the lake. This cluster of images -- the clearing, the light, and the lake -- assumes positive valuation because identified with "room to breathe in," an expanded vision of the scene, a spring, and recovered bearings. *Blake Nevius* notes that the clearing had both pictorial and psychological value for Cooper, "pictorial by virtue of the heightened contrasts between light and shade, open space and interminable forest...psychological because it provided an exhilarating relief from the claustrophobic experience of the woods" (89). To that I must add that circumscribed spaces, both natural and man-made, are also moral because associated consistently with *Deerslayer's* spirit, not with his ability to act. The lake that *Deerslayer* loves to contemplate is for him an "unusual opening into the mysteries and forms of the woods...[and] one is gratified in getting broader views of any subject that has long occupied his thoughts" (525). The "little area of light" (509) that *Hurry* and *Deerslayer* step into is thus an appropriate setting for their opening debate, won eventually by *Deerslayer*, the hero with the more balanced vision. Although physically vulnerable because his forest skills are untested, he is nonetheless morally upright. Like the lake itself that "mirror like" reflects heaven, *Deerslayer's* soul mirrors his purity. Both this purity and his corresponding inexperience are thus associated with contrasting qualities of the landscape, the clearing and the surrounding dark forests. Only *Deerslayer's* vision of the setting can embrace this pictorial opposition, and only he can symbolically balance it as he develops into the mature *Hawkeye*, the philosophic warrior.

*Deerslayer's* rite of passage is accomplished in stages, as he gradually moves from the light

and safety of bounded space to the dark, dangerous, and uncharted shore where he must prove himself. In the first chapters the novice moves primarily through this circumscribed, moral space -- the clearing surrounded by trees, the "forest-bound sheet of water...embedded between its mountains" (590), and the rooms of the castle and the ark. Here he reveals his own spiritual center, most particularly his moral nature as influenced by what little we know of his past. When Deerslayer gives voice to Christian ideals in the opening debate, Hurry concludes, "Damme, Deerslayer, if I do not believe you are, at heart, a Moravian" (508). Shortly thereafter, as the travelers reach Hutter's castle, Hurry, the man fascinated with external matters, "bustl[es] about the 'door yard,'" while the young hero examines first the outer room, then enters the passage leading to the "inner end of the house" (520), and then opens a door to Judith and Hetty's bedroom. He is drawn inward. In this inner chamber he discovers that "these little resemblances" between the sisters' possessions and those of his mother and sister "opened a long hidden vein of sensations" (521). Similarly, when they finally discover Hutter and his daughters on the Ark, Deerslayer again gravitates toward an inner room. While outside Hurry flirts with the wayward Judith, inside Deerslayer discovers Hetty, who like himself sheds "a halo of moral light" (544) on the room. Through their spatial orientation, the two sets of characters are revealed to be essentially dissimilar: Judith and Hurry care for appearances, while Deerslayer and Hetty appreciate moral truth, internalized value. Not surprisingly, the two immaculate souls are immediately drawn to one another, and it is here that Deerslayer tells Hetty about his Indian names. Cooper thus valorizes interior space through its association with Deerslayer's few memories, his moral instruction, and Hetty's spiritualized presence. Whether clearing, lake, or room, these enclosed areas, while radiating a feminine presence as some suggest, more significantly circumscribe Deerslayer's own inner light (Kolodny 112; Peck 84). In the first chapters of the novel, Deerslayer lingers in these enclosures, frequently debating or contemplating the nature of reality, a reality based on contrasting values -- between forest and lake, Hetty and Judith, red gifts and white, Hurry's code of revenge and his own moral precepts. Of all the characters, Deerslayer most fully comprehends these tensions but, as the untested initiate, he has not yet fully experienced them.

Although initially most comfortable in these interiors, Deerslayer gradually confronts the challenge of external space. While still a novice -- and in the beginning Cooper repeatedly reminds us that the young hunter has never killed a man -- Deerslayer remains on the periphery of the action, poised between interior safety and exterior action. At the liminal stage of his initiation, to borrow Victor Turner's terms, the uncertain hero is "structurally if not physically 'invisible'...a society's secular definitions do not allow for the existence of a not-boy-not-man" (95). The initiate pauses on the threshold of experience; Deerslayer stands before openings or apertures that frame and limit his vision of the violent shore. His liminality is suggested by his placement in a kind of "no man's land," the space between enclosures and the forest. Situated in this intermediate space, he witnesses both the Indian attack on the Ark and Hurry and Hutter's capture by the Mingos. In the first episode, the novice, safe inside the boat, gazes through a window at his Mingo enemies and at the tangled branches of the shore, the outside world that he must soon confront directly. During this early stage of his initiation, however, he does not fight but only acknowledges the foes "unmasking" themselves before him. As if to emphasize the hero's liminality, the boat simultaneously passes through an opening: "As he took his stand at a window, the Ark was just passing through the narrowest part of the stream, a point where the water first entered what was properly termed the river, and where the trees fairly interlocked over-head, causing the current to rush into an arch of verdure" (556).

Images of "this leafy entrance" or "aperture" into the forest, as well as uncertain light and sound, and indefinite placement between lake and land, repeatedly suggest Deerslayer's liminal

state. Through openings or in front of the forest, he catches glimpses of the forms he must ultimately confront in their own domain. As the Ark glides toward the lake away from the Indian menace, "the sun had not absolutely set, [but] it had withdrawn its direct rays from the valley," and objects are "visible, without giving up all their outlines at a glance" (554). When Deerslayer subsequently witnesses Hutter and Hurry's scalping raid, he remains in the canoe near the shore -- "holding fast" to the rushes that grew "in the water a hundred feet from the shore" (583).<sup>3</sup> In suspense he has difficulty identifying sounds -- the loon's call, the victim's cry. His eye cannot penetrate the "leafy surface" (584), and even when the Indians and their captors appear, Deerslayer, in the "obscurity...had been able barely to distinguish the group, and to see it retiring" (589). This sensual and spatial uncertainty conveys Deerslayer's liminality. At the same time, however, Cooper notes the fullness of his hero's vision, continuing the above sentence: "even this dim connection with human forms, gave an animation to the scene, that was strongly in contrast to the absolute solitude that remained." Although Deerslayer is still a witness to action, not a participant, his heroic potential is always apparent because his consciousness records both the violent actions of man and the sublimity of nature, the fundamental opposition that he must experience to become a man.

Similarly, spatial uncertainty suggests Deerslayer's inexperience in the key episode of his initiation, the famous scene when he kills his first man. At dawn Deerslayer approaches the shore; his rifle is first raised against the enemy as he stands in his canoe. After landing, he awaits the Indian's reappearance near similarly indeterminate space, "a small open area, partly in native grass, and partly beach" (594), behind which stand "the gloomy vaults of the forests." Deerslayer waits poised before a threshold. Typically, the novice, once initiated, passes across a threshold, but Deerslayer's eye, not his body, penetrates the opening, both when sighting his enemy and later, as the Mingo glares at him "through a small opening in the bushes" (598), when shooting him. Initially, his passage is primarily visual, earning him the name Hawkeye, the "more manly title" of the initiated individual whose vision conquers space.

Deerslayer achieves manhood about one-fifth of the way through the novel. The two remaining episodes on shore, Hist's rescue and the return from his furlough, demonstrate the appropriateness of his name and the integrity of his nature, or the synthesis of the physical man -- the hero who dares step into the forest -- and the spiritual man -- the hero who comprehends nature's moral lessons. In contrast to Hurry and Hutter, Deerslayer lands only when necessary, and only when acting in accordance with his ideals of friendship and honor. When helping Chingachgook rescue Hist, for example, the hero leaves his friend posted by the meeting place and goes to ascertain the enemy's position: "The canoe lay in front of a natural vista, not only through the bushes that lined the shore, but of the trees also, that afforded a clear view of the camp" (759). Through this "opening," Deerslayer sees his first panoramic vista of a Mingo camp. As in his hero's earlier visions of the shore, Cooper here stresses the pictorial quality of "a picture that Salvator Rosa would have delighted to draw" (759), tracing his hero's emerging identity through his visual perceptions. Deerslayer's first full view of the enemy activates two kinds of vision, poetical insight that gives him "pleasure at looking on the scene he now beheld, that momentarily caused him to forget the object of his visit" (759) and keen physical sight that gives him the enemies' precise strength. The more mature hero blends his powers ever more readily. In this scene Cooper repeats the spatial patterns of Deerslayer's earlier movements outward. He circles back to the initiatory experience. The expectant Hawkeye is in a liminal state on his "first war-path" (754); his eye first pierces the forest opening; then he approaches the wilderness threshold. Cooper describes the movements of a hero increasingly able to discern his enemy in uncertain light and better prepared to enter the forest. Indeed, so obsessive is Cooper about framing that each episode is bracketed by authorial comment, first about Hawkeye's inexperience and then, at the close of each scene, about his glorious name.



The hero completes his initiation in the final approach to shore, another "maiden adventure," for he has "never been tried in torment" (782). Here Cooper stages the most significant moment in *Deerslayer's* rite of passage. Because he rashly shot the eagle during his furlough, an act more becomin' two boys to gratify their feelin's, in this onthoughtful manner, than two warriors on a war path, even though it be their first" (928), Hawkeye embarks afresh to prove himself a man. As he steps onto another point, a clearing before the forest, "the eye penetrated the woods immediately on reaching the strand" (946). Not in gloom or by firelight but in the midday sun, he "advanced with a steady tread towards the group of chiefs" (947) surrounded by "the whole band, men, women and children...to be a witness" (948). For the first time, *Deerslayer* sees the whole of the enemy force with a clear eye. He now steps into the middle of the most spiritualized forest interior, where he will symbolically consecrate his powers and complete his initiation:

The arches of the woods, even at high noon, cast their sombre shadows on the spot, which the brilliant rays of the sun that struggled through the leaves contributed to mellow, and, if such an expression can be used, to illuminate. It was probably from a similar scene that the mind of man first got its idea of the effects of gothic tracery and churchly hues, this temple of nature producing some such effect, so far as light and shadow were concerned, as the well known offspring of human invention (948-49).

Appropriately, the description of this opening blends contrasting values of light and shade, of forest gloom and interior meaning. In such a spot, the character whose virtues of action and reflection have been similarly blended will demonstrate his fortitude during the most rigorous of trials.

The scenes that follow show the hero at his wildest, his bravest, and his strongest. In the whole of the *Leatherstocking* series, only in this episode does he undergo such a severe test at the hands of an enemy who fully appreciates his fortitude. After Hawkeye has brained Panther, escaped briefly, and stoically faced some of the trials, Rivenoak "told his people that the pale face had proved himself to be a man" (982), the last time such a remark is made in this novel. By moving into and through the forest, the hero achieves his adult status. Earlier described as a "sapling" and first associated with trees when he killed his first man, the mature hero is now repeatedly identified with trees, with the forests where he will act throughout his life. More particularly, the novelist fully identifies his hero with the wilderness that he inhabits in the next *Leatherstocking* novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*. Hawkeye seeks shelter under a decayed log when he escapes. The Mingos "incorporate the prisoner with the tree" (974) when they tie him. He faces the trials of the knife and tomahawk, his "whole body as immovable as the tree to which he was bound" (980). And watching the warriors prepare for torture by fire, he "stood seemingly as unmoved as one of the pines of the hills" (998). The initiated hero is not daunted by the forest but defined by it.

Thus, pictorial contrast helps define *Deerslayer's* emerging identity; he sees both beauty and danger in the wilderness. Cooper carefully stages each scene in order to demonstrate the growth of *Deerslayer's* forest wiliness, the development of his exceptional gifts that complement his moral rectitude. His outward movement toward experience may be understood in relation to *Deerslayer's* many explanations of man's nature and his gifts. As the lake is a gem in the forest, so is man's soul a gem within. Created with a soul, any man has the potential to prove "the high powers of his far reaching mind," to create a Gothic temple that glorifies God, to recognize God's presence in the wilderness. Gifts, on the other hand, are understood in the realm of earthly action, where men are nurtured differently. *Deerslayer's* gifts -- his attitude toward scalping and

killing, his views on marriage, his skill with a rifle, his fortitude when tortured -- all these are demonstrated in the course of his initiation. And all are defined in relation to an opposing course of action, whether Indian or unscrupulous white. In this initiation saga, the hero identifies the particular gifts that complement his nature. The landscape of experience tests those gifts, as enclosures remind us of his moral center.

Whereas the trials on share fully demonstrate *Deerslayer's* physical prowess, the challenge on the Ark tests his emotional resolve. He must discover and resist the temptations of sexuality before he completes his metamorphosis. In *The Deerslayer* the hero spends more time inside than in any other tale in the series, and thus we must agree with *Deerslayer* that Hutter's dwelling "was in singular harmony with all the rest of the scene" (607) and recognize that the landscape includes the castle and the Ark where he spends a good third of his time. These scenes further develop the tensions between internal and external space, and, more importantly, further illuminate *Deerslayer's* psyche, the interior space of the moral hero. In no other Leatherstocking novel do we so fully appreciate the inner man.

Visually, the sexual trial complements the physical tests because Judith, a woman of some experience, is as enticing and as dangerous as the forests. In fact, Cooper describes them in similar terms. The forests, observes David Brion Davis, are "physical in an almost sexual sense," while Judith's beauty is "entirely external and thus divorced from natural moral purity" (20). Indeed, her allure is defined solely in relation to the woods and darkness. When Hurry Harry first describes her in natural metaphors, he notes that "the clouds that drive among these hills are not more unsartain" (505). When first seen, she peers through leaves, her face in shadow. Whereas Hetty's pure spirit sheds light, Judith's sullied soul, like the tree-lined shore, casts shadows: "Her rich hair shaded her spirited and yet soft countenance, even at that hour rendering it the more beautiful, as the rose is loveliest when reposing amid the shadows and contrasts of its native foliage" (572). Chingachgook dubs her the "Wild Rose," the flower of the forests. For *Deerslayer*, forest and woman present similar dangers. To look into Judith's soul is to gaze at "workings of a heart...treacherous... uncertain, and...impetuous in its feelings" (634). Initially he feels drawn to Hetty, whose soul he intuitively appreciates. Judith as quickly earns his censure, and she hardly merits a glance when he first sees her. That he is not insensitive to her charms, however, is clear from the many admiring looks he soon casts her way.

Judith's spirit and intelligence make her one of Cooper's most fascinating heroines. Certainly no other heroine in the Leatherstocking tales is as important to an understanding of the hero as she is. Noting that both are social outcasts, Nina Baym identifies a "kinship between Judith and the hero" (706), a kinship that is best suggested, I believe, in the similarity of their situations and their perceptions. Both face moments of transition in their lives. In Judith we see the author's "only attempt to depict a change of personality," observes John Lynen (178). She, like *Deerslayer*, exists in a liminal state, poised between her sordid past and the possibilities of virtue suggested by *Deerslayer*, the first honorable young man that she has met. And like *Deerslayer*, the potential grandeur, the "richness" of her nature is conveyed through her sensitivity to the conflicting nature of reality. Judith knows the truth about others and learns the truth about herself, her own goodness and folly. Thus, to convey her liminality and to visually associate her with the hero who assumes her position shortly thereafter, Cooper first locates Judith at "an opening in the leaves" (541), the window where she gazes out at *Deerslayer* and Hurry. Her uncertainty, however, is described in terms diametrically opposed to *Deerslayer's*. While he must move outward into the physical space of experience, she must discover inner value, having all too successfully confronted and conquered external reality in the past -- in the form of a British officer. In the scene that introduces Judith, her physical confidence is demonstrated when she dashes outside the Ark and shoves an Indian from the



boat. Inside the young hero looks on. Throughout the novel, she warns Deerslayer of imminent Mingo treachery. While we see Deerslayer as a morally, not physically, mature man, we first see Judith as a physically, not spiritually, developed woman. She must undergo a moral trial that complements, although it does not duplicate, Deerslayer's passage into maturity.

Contrasted with Deerslayer's solitary movements outward, however, Judith's movement inward requires his participation -- and therein lies the reason for her ultimate failure. After meeting the young man, she shifts her gaze from the forest to Deerslayer's soul, and this becomes the aperture she gazes through, the "window in his breast, through which the light of his honesty was ever shining" (639). Because so strongly affected herself, Judith tries to turn Deerslayer's gaze from the forests to interior space, to have him appreciate her soul as fully as she does his. She tries, by dismissing and disguising her own natural beauty, to turn his eye from her charms to her heart. In "managing her attack on his affections" (742) she threatens the balance of his character.

Deerslayer inspires Judith to search her own soul as well as his. And like the hero's episodic passage, Judith's movements inward are similarly framed, in this case by the trunk she twice opens and by the smaller chest that contains the letters. Psychologically, an examination of her father's trunk is an attempt to realize an identity. Descriptions of the trunk and its associations suggest a connection between the girl and the "dark," "richly wrought" (610), and "comely" (684) chest. As beautiful on the outside as she is, it too bears "proofs of having received much ill treatment," having had "rough collisions...with substances still harder than itself" (610). She approaches it warily, with a "species of reverence" (688) appropriate for a sacred object, a "relic" -- her character. The locked trunk contains dark secrets, and Judith needs Deerslayer's assistance to lift the heavy lid, just as she needs his help in understanding herself. On various levels are the strata of Judith's maculate character and at base it holds the letters that partially explain her storied identity. In examining the contents, she exposes the essence of her character, both to her own eyes and to the more critical eye of Deerslayer. Near the end of the first chest-opening episode, the author remarks that Judith "had been too much accustomed to live for self, and for the indulgence of her own vanities, to feel her mother's wrongs very keenly. It required extraordinary circumstances to awaken a proper sense of her situation, and to stimulate the better feelings of this beautiful, but misguided girl" (703). The episodes with the chest provide the needed stimulation, for after each Judith gives clearer proof of her love for Deerslayer and her determination to change her nature.

The first layer contains the finery she loves, the most obvious of her characteristics. When she sees the brocade dress, "her rapture was almost childish" (692), a response clearly contrasted with Deerslayer's mature solemnity. If the scene represents a "paradigm of children's games," as H. Daniel Peck argues (70), only Judith and Chingachgook play those games; they take childish pleasure in the beauty of clothes; they both dress up in the costumes and "have all the rapture to themselves" (702). Deerslayer scorns to take part in such frippery. Because he does not trifle with appearances, he will not don the jacket as Judith urges: "See me in a coat fit for a Lord! -- Well, Judith, if you wait till that day, you'll wait until you see me beyond reason and memory" (691). Having achieved his identity, Deerslayer will not abandon it for another. For the beautiful girl, however, clothes alter her identity; mistakenly, she wishes to attract Deerslayer by modeling the dress and later tries to free him by playing the part of a noblewoman. Both attempts fail.

Although Judith's beauty is associated with the dark forests, her true identity is not. Indeed, of all women in the *Leatherstocking* tales, Judith is the least sensitive to the natural world she inhabits. Cooper never envisions a scene through her eyes, never records her

responses to nature. This is one way of conveying her moral deficiency, her inferiority to the responsive Hetty and to the noble Deerslayer. Whereas Hetty cannot conceive of departure from the lake, Judith can. Her identity has been assumed in another realm, in the civilized world of fine clothing, of clearings where she initially prefers to dwell, and of officers who dally with her. The next layer contains items as singularly out of place in the wilderness as is Judith herself -- the "mathematical instruments that were then in use among seamen" (701), the chess pieces from "some distant country" (703), and the pistols deprecatingly described as "a species of arms seldom employed; never, indeed, unless it might be by some officer from Europe" (697). Deerslayer scorns this layer as well, most particularly the loaded guns -- and in so doing passes judgment on Judith's forest flirtations. He remarks that loaded guns often cause "an accident" that results in "sartain death to a child, or a brother, or a fri'nd!" (698). Similar carelessness resulted in Judith's lost innocence. When Deerslayer fires one pistol, it explodes in his hands. Frightened and seemingly wounded by the actual explosion, Judith has a "violent fit of trembling" (700) and cries. Physically unharmed, she is emotionally shocked. Her own toying with officers has also backfired and wounded her soul more severely. Significantly, the hero pays a price for his participation in Judith's quest. While "returning every thing to its proper place" (705) and conversing with Judith, Deerslayer misses the raft that approaches unexpectedly. "Had we been watchful, and keen eyed, such a surprise could never have happened" (706-7). Clearly Deerslayer's eye should be turned outward, not inward to study a character so unfit.

On the night when Judith next examines the trunk, she impatiently draws Deerslayer inside to witness her self-examination: "Any thing will give me satisfaction that tells me who I am, and helps to explain the dreams of childhood" (891). Determined that this time "we will go to the bottom" (889), she opens yet another chest containing a "mine of hitherto concealed knowledge" (892). In her mother's letters, however, Judith finds only partial answers to her inward quest: they tell of another Judith Hutter's old love affair; and the daughter "discovered a few points of strong resemblance between these letters and some it had been her own fate to receive" (893). Having read the letters and reached the bottom of the trunk, the furthest reaches of her own quest for understanding, Judith reaches an impasse. Although enlightening, the letters deprive her of her old identity as Thomas Hutter's daughter without giving her a new one -- all references to the names of her mother and her real father have been carefully deleted. Judith's quest fails. She cannot accomplish her transformation, in part because she has no identity. Whereas Deerslayer earns a name, she has lost her good name and cannot recover her real one. Significantly, her search is retrospective, focused on "the historical part of the papers" (895), on the literal baggage of her original sins, while Deerslayer's is prospective, focused on the challenge to heroic action, of which the reader of the first novels is already aware. Furthermore, she fails because she needs more than Deerslayer's physical assistance in opening the chest -- more than his outward admiration of her beauty. She desires his love which he denies her. She cannot fix his gaze inward for, as he once again tells her, his sight must be directed outward: "don't try to entice me to overlook my furlough, gal! -- A furlough is a sacred thing among warriors and men that carry their lives in their hands, as we of the forests do" (898). They are literate in different languages, she reading letters, he, as he tells her, reading only the "book...which God has opened afore all his creatur's in the noble forests" (899). Repeatedly, Deerslayer defines for Judith the kind of vision that he seeks in this novel -- a keen and poetical vision of the forests. Although her proposal of marriage presents the hero with a pleasant "image," it is false: "a vision floated before the mind's eve of the young hunter, but, accustomed most to practical things, and little addicted to submitting to the power of his imagination...he soon recovered his reason and smiled at his own weakness, as the fancied picture faded from his mental sight" (904). A man of action will not be deluded by the shadows of the cave, the falsely limited vision that belies the true one outside.

Thus, *Deerslayer* sways Judith's conscience more than she ever rouses his feelings. His sexual trial, his forced movement inward, is less a test of his resolve than a demonstration of his influence. Judith finds that "his words go directly to the heart, finding their support in the understanding" (696). In no other Leatherstocking tale is Cooper so conscious of his hero's effect on others; in no other does he create a white character so fully able to comprehend the inner man. The intelligent, insightful, and erring Judith fully appreciates the complexity of *Deerslayer's* heroic resolution: "Perhaps Judith was the first individual of his own colour, who fairly submitted to this natural consequence of truth and fair-dealing, on the part of *Deerslayer*. She had actually pined for his praise...." (696). Perhaps she is a model of erring humanity, who, in looking into Cooper's text, may be similarly improved by contact with this literary paragon.

Cooper's last Leatherstocking tale differs significantly in structure and in intention from the earlier novels. In the first three tales the hero is defined dialectically. Natty, as an emanation of nature, staunchly but vainly opposes Judge Temple's progressive visions; as a guardian of nature, he fights Magua's sinister designs, albeit ineffectually; as an avatar of the forests, he assumes an heroic stance in the sterile landscape of the prairie. In the two last-written novels, however, the hero's identity emerges from an inner tension that is resolved in the course of the tale, not from his conflict with inimical forces. Although he continues to defy his enemies and their views, that conflict does not provide the focus of meaning in either *The Deerslayer* or *The Pathfinder*. Unlike the titles of the earlier tales that suggest the forces Natty opposes, the titles of these clearly convey the importance of the hero's identity. The virile *Pathfinder* faces a personal crisis -- he falls in love. While always conscious of his fully developed skill as a scout, he comes to terms with the temptations of marital fulfillment. *Deerslayer* reconciles the part of the self that acts with its complement that knows truth.

In *The Deerslayer*, then, Cooper does not effect a mythic escape from reality, but instead confronts central moral questions posed to human identity. The pictorial contrasts that inform the text identify both the heroic character, as I have demonstrated, and Cooper's theme. Just as the lake is always envisioned in contrast to the dark shore, the "gem" within man must be seen in the context of human action. Marius Bewley notes that characters in *The Deerslayer* are seen opposed to one another on a moral grid (73-100). It is better, perhaps, to see that all have mixed natures, that all partake, if you will, of lake and shore. Tom Hutter's nature "was of that fearful mixture of good and evil, that so often enters into the moral composition of man" (568). Being dragged helplessly through the water and confronting the possibility of death has a "chastening effect" on Hurry Harry's character (842). Hetty, like *Deerslayer* a moral paragon, always refers to herself as Thomas Hutter's daughter, aligning herself, albeit unconsciously, with flawed humanity. Chingachgook and Hist, like *Deerslayer*, define themselves in a landscape of contrast, responsive to both nature's beauty and its dangers. Cooper carefully identifies variations on the theme of human action, where no one is exempt from either the glimmerings of spirit or the knowledge of wickedness.

In this context, the last pages can be seen as a return to the contrasting values so evident in the first chapter. On the eve of war, the three companions, *Deerslayer*, Chingachgook, and Uncas, return to a lake where "all was unchanged" -- in the natural scene. But the testimonies of human action are melancholy: bones litter the battleground, Judith may have reverted to her old sins, and the threat of war is imminent. The final picture balances beauty and an awareness of human transience. And the final sentence provides an appropriate gloss on this scene: "We live in a world of transgressions and selfishness, and no pictures that represent us otherwise can be true, though, happily, for human nature, gleamings of that pure spirit in whose likeness man has been fashioned, are to be seen relieving its deformities, and mitigating if not excusing its crimes" (1030). Cooper must have been aware throughout this text that his heroes' next

adventures occur in a landscape of terror, the bloody wilderness of *The Last of the Mohicans*. If here we are acutely aware that a spiritual awareness informs Deerslayer's every action, there we see the "killer" predominate. But the true hero, Cooper reminds us, has both sapience and fortitude.

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## NOTES

1. Previous studies of Cooper's landscapes have profoundly influenced my analysis. I am indebted to John Lynen's discussion of landscape and identity in *The Pioneers*; Donald Ringe's comments on pictorial contrast in the setting of *The Deerslayer*; Blake Nevius's study of Cooper's aesthetics; and H. Daniel Peck's suggestive readings of Cooper's enclosures.

2. I thank James Franklin Beard, Donald Ringe and other participants in the 1986 Cooper Seminar for their suggestive comments on this essay. More particularly, Donald Ringe helped focus my attention on Deerslayer's literary identity and James Beard shared his views on the hero's moral dilemma.

3. Robert Clark argues that the "data" in the novel were "the authorized language of Common Sense, the verisimilitude of factualism. Here, in *The Deerslayer*, it is applied as secondary revision to restore the appearance of logicity to a text..." (101). I believe, however, that this data suggests that acuteness of Deerslayer's developing awareness of danger. In each scene where he approaches shore, he pauses one hundred yards from his enemy. Whereas his poetical eye repeatedly records nature's wonders, his critical eye quantifies and qualifies the wilderness scenes.

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