

CONTAINING MANHOOD IN JAMES FENIMORE

COOPER'S *THE DEERSLAYER*

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OUTSIDE OR FORCED INSIDE

On the surface *The Deerslayer* is a magnificent novel of exterior adventure, of the outdoors or the outside, "one of the most beautiful and most perfect books in the world" (106), in the words of D.H.Lawrence. In this it relates to well-known Romantic attitudes toward the healthiness of contact with Nature and suspicion of the polished facades of the metropolis. In Henry Nash Smith's classic summary, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950), "the character of Leatherstocking is by far the most important symbol of the national experience of adventure across the continent" (61). Nonetheless, only partly can it be said that *The Deerslayer* is a book which articulates certain aspects of the American putative distaste for authority, taking pleasure in the love of the great outdoors and the absence of restrictions contained within towns and houses, for *The Deerslayer* may more significantly be seen as an intriguing succession of interiors, of insides, and of containment. From the centripetal attractions and dangers of the enclosed-by-forest Glimmerglass lake, through the claustrophobic combination of safety and danger of Hutter's Castle, to the uncertain floating refuge which is the Ark, along with numerous other occasions of concealment or capture, the characters are not so much adventuring outside as constantly forced inside. Indeed, with this containment we appear to enter the protocols of the Gothic's engagement with the threat of transgression and the consequent obsession with secrecy and enigma. In this destabilized fable of the mythic intensity of the scouting life as represented by Cooper we thus encounter the paradox that the characters are perpetually needing to hide, to find and stay in or make use of spaces which enclose them away from others. Life becomes dominated by the need to be not outside at all but inside and to be ever vigilant about the capacity of the space characters are in to keep them separate from others.¹ Their

¹ Along with needing to be apart from others, in *The Last of the Mohicans* characters often need to be disguised from others, an extension of the enclosure of self, which reaches well-known and delirious limits in the second half of the novel.

outdoor lives are seen in this way to become constant exercises in inwardness and withdrawal, in boundary marking and patrolling the frontiers of the self.

Annette Kolodny, in *The Lay of the Land* (1975), dealt with all of the Leatherstocking tales in terms of Natty Bumppo's relation to the enclosing space of the forest as a trope of the maternal space. In summarizing this relation over the whole five novels, Kolodny concludes that "Natty can never experience adult human relations within the social community; the pastoral impulse has led him back into the liquid embrace of nature's womb" (114). Kolodny's analysis, coming when it did, read the novels in terms of the burgeoning feminist criticism of its time, in which signs of woman are interrogated for their ideological charges. Nonetheless, Kolodny's reading, restricted as it was to a reduced synthesis of the whole five novels, does not go far enough, and presumes that only Nature could do duty as the feminine space. In fact, and concentrating here on *The Deerslayer*, there are far more enclosing spaces than that of the forest, and the characters in this novel spend much more time in those other spaces than they do in the forest. As Daniel Peck pointed out shortly afterwards, "Interiority is, of course, a feminine quality, and Cooper's houses and forest both radiate an intense feminine presence" (74). Moreover, neither the forest nor any other space operates unambiguously as protective enclosure. The interplay between such spaces becomes of absorbing interest as it complicates considerably the mythic impulses in Cooper's work and in certain readings the tensions become even more apparent than Kolodny was led to note.

There is, however, a notable antecedent for Kolodny's reading, although it seems likely that she was not aware of it at the time; certainly it is not cited in her work. That is Lawrence's less well-known uncollected versions of *Studies in Classic American Literature*, published as *The Symbolic Meaning* in 1962. There Lawrence assays theories of Deerslayer's relation to the feminine and, in Lawrence's familiar primeval focus, suggests that if Judith Hutter could have "possessed" (108) Deerslayer, she would have been "possessing him utterly, as if he were enveloped in her own womb, would worship him" (109). However, Deerslayer resists, and "sticks to his own singleness. A race falls when men begin to worship the Great Mother, when they are enveloped within the woman, as a child in the womb...For him there is no slipping back into the womb" (109). Both Lawrence and Kolodny then perceive the novel as in some way dramatising a response to the establishment of male boundaries, except that where Kolodny reads the forest as a maternal enclosing space in which Deerslayer fixes himself so as to avoid the need to enter the world of the sexual, Lawrence reads the sexual as a strategy used by Judith to try to absorb Deerslayer into the oppression of what is

ultimately a maternally enclosing space, a relationship with a woman, a space that Deerslayer rejects, escaping into the forest. For Kolodny, the forest is the maternal space; for Lawrence it is the escape from the maternal.

This movement of attraction and repulsion, and the tensions and ambiguities that it evidences, are what twentieth-century readers find most interesting in literary works. Indeed, these tensions are inescapable in the light of Cooper's priorities, for as Jane Tompkins so rightly pointed out in her classic "No Apologies for the Iroquois: A New Way to Read the Leatherstocking Novels" differentiation and categorization lie at the heart of Cooper's work, that is, anxieties over the transgression of one category into another, especially, in Tompkins's formulation, those of ethnicity. Absorption into anything would obviate worries over categorization, but as Barbara Creed indicates in *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1995), "the desire to return to the original oneness of things, to return to the mother/womb, is primarily a desire for non-differentiation" (28), and, as Creed goes on, "both the mother and death signify a monstrous obliteration of the self" (30). That is, to avoid the dirtiness and hybridities of category transgression the novel attempts to find spaces within which the Deerslayer can preserve himself, but, not finding a consistently safe zone, it is unable to prevent the obliteration of the self within the maternal forest as the only sure way to escape the twinned dangers of transgression presented by Women or Huron.

MEN AND WOMEN

The Deerslayer is a novel of twinned oscillations then—not only the obvious one between cultures but that between men and women, for instance. Although ostensibly an outdoors adventure of the most rugged and hair raising sort (even literally), women feature centrally and constantly among the reduced cast. All of Cooper's adventure novels, *The Deerslayer* more than most, frequently swerve away from masculine adventure to focus on questions more associated with the novel of sentiment, generally in ways which test the credulity of those readers for whom realism, that is, those generic conventions that pass for realism within the adventure narrative, is the only appropriate strategy for such a tale. For example, when Deerslayer is held captive by the Huron and contemplating torture and death, the supposedly unbalanced Hetty Hutter arrives in the encampment (permitted to come and go by the Huron on account of her mental state) and has a conversation with Deerslayer about the operations of attractiveness between men and women. Or on what is likely to be the Deerslayer's last night on earth before he must give himself up to the Huron as promised,

he sits on the edge of the Castle, a wooden structure in the middle of the lake, and discusses the same topic with Hetty's sister, Judith. At the same time, for all Cooper's clear interest in the differing tests of moral character and category thrown up by the relative positions of men and women in close contact with each other as well as with the difference of Native American cultures, there were still elements of his absorption in these issues which Cooper was able to deal with narratively only by means of a great deal of displacement of the implications and nature of what the feminine might have meant for him, away from the actual women characters and onto either the narrative's setting and/or several of its apparently incidental components.

That these were indeed anxieties and not smugly assumed hierarchies, as appears to be the background against which some readers respond to Cooper, seems to be a more useful way to read his work. And as we all know, anxieties, especially unadmitted ones, have ways of appearing in writers' work transmuted into iconographies and signifying networks which relate in lateral and surprising fashion to the real zones in which the anxieties operate. In the words of James Franklin Beard's "Historical Introduction" to the standard SUNY edition of *The Deerslayer*: "it has seemed to critics the most equivocal, elusive, and enigmatic" (ix) of Cooper's novels. And one of the best articles on *The Last of the Mohicans*, Forrest Robinson's "Uncertain Borders: Race, Sex and Civilization in *The Last of the Mohicans*" (1991), outlines patiently the now widely-accepted view that Cooper was only in partial control of the categories he was wielding and juxtaposing in a novel an early anonymous reviewer referred to as "the visions of a long and feverish dream" (90).

The anxieties within Cooper's treatment of the relations of men and women appear to be most obviously displaced onto the series of enclosures which the narrative contains, and with whose existence I began this article. The dichotomies of inside and outside so insistently oscillated between in the novel seem thus to relate to Cooper's well-known apprehensions with respect to boundaries, limits and dividing lines, and, once again, in as relatedly delirious a fashion as the dizzying succession of disguises in the last quarter of *The Last of the Mohicans*. These enclosures, which we may speculatively trace back to their origins as signs of the maternal, enable the narrative to articulate a series of confrontations with the abject that the maternal represents, and thence, in Barbara Creed's words, "in order finally to eject the abject and redraw the boundaries" (14), in this case between the male and female categories.

This makes of the novel a truly doubled process. On the one hand *The Deerslayer* ends up by enfolding himself within the maternal in order to avoid the menace of category

transgression; but at the same time the novel enacts a constant movement of attraction and repulsion with respect to the object represented by that same maternal principle. This process is articulated by means of the Deerslayer's continual negotiation of and use of the novel's multiple enclosing spaces, a usage in which he is always seen as the most proficient of the book's characters.

The first of these enclosing spaces is the lake, one of the most densely rendered landscapes in all English fiction surely; indeed, for D.H. Lawrence, it was "perhaps, lovelier than any place created in language" (106). To float on its surface is to experience peace and contentment, much as we might imagine it is to float, cared for, within the maternal security and identification of the Imaginary which is the amniotic fluid. And yet, as with that situation, the trouble is that perils lurk on every side in the dark woods. To abandon the lake is potentially to encounter death, and the surroundings give no indication of where it is waiting and where it might be avoided. Indeed, the sensation is rather that wherever one lands ashore one is likely to be destroyed, or, significantly, shot with arrows. Leaving the security of the maternal is to come up against men, specifically, who are imagined to want to kill one or to force one into category transgression—that is, to join the Huron people. The maternal space, then, at its most basic level, offers a certain security but is also pregnant with the menace of its inevitable boundaries. Moreover, with the lake functioning in this way, the assertion that the forest is the principal maternal space in the novel becomes destabilized, or at the least diluted, especially when the forest's principal threat is the presence of death-dealing men.

Within the lake, there is a further enclosure, Hutter's Castle, a stoutly-built wooden redoubt, which is described as an enclosure within an enclosure. If the lake can be said to function as some form of always already insecure feminine security, in the twinned associations of both Nature and the enclosing space with the maternal, whose borders break down and leak in insecurity and history, the Castle is a man-made enclosure, that, despite its massive solidity, is as defective as the lake as a refuge from the incursions of the outside. Erected by Thomas Hutter as a refuge against not just the Huron but civilization in general, it is as constantly threatened a space as the lake or indeed the surrounding forests (conventionally functioning as feminine territory to be claimed and utilised by men). Both natural and cultural enclosures thus leak the threatening outside world in; boundaries between within and without are constantly under threat and the protagonists are continually having to negotiate new ways to reestablish these boundaries.

However, whether the Castle is made by men or not, such a space still exists, according to Roger Dadoun, as a sign of the "archaic mother," that is, the mother who gives birth, specifically "the bad archaic mother" (Creed, 20). It is perhaps not accidental that the structure is termed a "Castle," referencing the iconography of the Gothic, in which castles and their rooms function more transparently as signs of both refuge and entrapment. Interior spaces are unquestionably threatening in the Gothic, their protective potential quickly destabilized by hidden presences, by secret openings that let disruptive forces enter or that lead, by the extension of their logic, into overprotection or incarceration, so memorably represented by Brockden Brown or by Poe, as we all know, but also by Cooper in novel after novel. In all of these possibilities, the interior space's protective possibilities, that we might include within the paradigm of the maternal, are also the site of protection's always implied other: risk.

THE LAYERS OF THE SEALED CHEST

In the succession of enclosures with which the novel is so provided, the sealed chest within the Castle is the strangest enclosure of all, and perhaps something of its intensity is suggested by the fact that the SUNY Press edition chose as its cover Chingachgook examining an ivory elephant taken from the chest, that lies open in the center of the cover's illustration. Inside the dual enclosures of Glimmerglass and Castle, it also has multiple compartments, each one revealing secrets and interiorities. Like the name of the Castle, it partakes of the protocols of the Gothic, with its reworking of motifs drawn from folk tales and legends that deal with the hidden recesses of the human psyche.

It is first opened when Tom Hutter and Hurry Harry have been captured by the Iroquois, that is when those men who most represent white masculinity, both mature authority and youthful strength and beauty, are captured by the men whose death Tom and Hurry had thought to effect and by which they feel their masculinity would have been affirmed. With their agency denied, it falls to a group of deviations from white masculinity to save them: their daughters, Deerslayer (whose relation to both whiteness and masculinity is ambiguous) and Chingachgook. It is Tom's daughter Judith who decides to open her father's secret chest to see if there is anything which might be used to ransom them back. The disclosures of the casket reveal surprising contents.

With respect to the casket in *The Deerslayer* there appear to be three distinct sections, three being a mythic number of options in folk and fairy tales. When the chest is first opened,

various levels are revealed, each wrapped up in its own dividing cloth. The first reveals splendid and incongruously ornate and sumptuous apparel; the second a mixture of objects belonging to spheres and activities far removed from those of the wilderness; while the third will only be opened later in the novel, and it contains papers which relate to the origins of the girls and their "father."

Returning to the moment when the chest is opened for the first time, we see that all of the Others on the boat play a role in some way. The key had been hidden in Hetty's clothes by the father, it is Chingachgook who finds it, it is Deerslayer who actually opens the hasps of the chest, and it is Judith whose idea it has been to open it. The chest furthermore has had properties within the family that relate it to the magical protocols of the Gothic, in that:

"Judith had held this chest, and its unknown contents, in a species of reverence as long as she could remember. Neither her father, nor her mother, ever mentioned it, in her presence, and there appeared to be a silent convention, that in naming the different objects that occasionally stood near it, or even lay on its lid, care should be had to avoid any allusion to the chest itself [...] Judith was not altogether free from a little superstition on the subject of this chest, which had stood a sort of tabooed relic before her eyes, from childhood to the present hour." (209)

When Judith goes to open the chest, she cannot and it appears to her "that she was resisted in an unhallowed attempt by some supernatural power" (210). Resorting to supernatural solutions is not something associated with Fenimore Cooper, and of course here there are not any either, but in the sense by one of the characters that such forces are associated with this intense moment, we are entering the covenant of the Gothic it seems to me. The lid is too heavy for Judith to open and it requires Deerslayer's strength, yet even when the chest is opened, "Judith fairly trembled" (210).

What is discovered in the chest occurs in stages, and it is worth looking at the junctures of the plot these occur and their consequences. Ultimately, what lies at the bottom of the trunk is surprising evidence about Judith's parentage, another staple of the Gothic narrative, although also of the eighteenth-century novel that preceded it, not to mention of romantic novels or even fairy tales. Indeed, the injunction not to open the chest reminds of nothing so much as the injunctions in fairy tales not to open the door, go into the room, open the box etc. Maria Tatar, in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1987), points out that "time and again, the knowledge hidden behind the locked doors of fairy tales is carnal in the literal or figurative sense of the term" (168). Prohibitions in fairy tales of this sort relate to

the fear and anxiety aroused by sexuality, and although the chest is opened and inspected by a group of men and women, of two ethnic groups, it is Judith who feels the force of her father's prohibition most keenly, and the revelations of the chest will eventually reveal information about her mother's sexual behavior that will confirm the Deerslayer's rejection of her, and thus of his own sexuality.²

The first things that are uncovered are fine and even gaudy items of male clothing, to which Chingachgook responds enthusiastically. Like the items in a fairy tale test however, our hero rejects this first item as superficial finery, and the relative positions of Deerslayer and Chingachgook in the moral hierarchy are witnessed by the latter's putting on of the garments. In Cooper's underestimated dry humor, "the transformation was ludicrous, but as men are seldom struck with incongruities in their own appearance, any more than in their own conduct, the Delaware studied this change . . . with grave interest" (211). Nonetheless, there are problems with this attire. It is too big for Henry Hutter. Why would he be guarding so closely another man's clothes? Of a type completely inappropriate for his life and location as well? Evidence, perhaps, of a troubled masculinity that is sheltering the signs of another man's presence, precisely the other man with whom his wife had had sexual relations.

These garments are followed by equally sumptuous ones of female attire, and although not a practical option for Deerslayer, nor suitable for any woman on the frontier, he is stunned by Judith's beauty when dressed in these clothes. Nonetheless, his praise holds shadows. His suggestion that she is so stunning that she can now be used as a bargaining chip with the Mingos, although not serious, relegates her to the level of Chingachgook's appreciation of the clothes: wondrous they might be but ultimately they represent inferior values, values such as the Indians would appreciate. Indeed, he goes on to say as much when Judith expresses disappointment at his idea to use the finery to bargain for her father and Hurry Harry. By these two rejections, in the man and the woman, Deerslayer has situated

² It is clear what sort of reading I am giving Cooper's work. However, in terms of the historical contexts of Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, Barbara Mann's brilliant recent doctoral dissertation "Forbidden Ground: Racial Politics and Hidden Identity in James Fenimore Cooper's Leather-Stocking Tales" (December 1997) is an exhaustive unveiling of Cooper's use of Heckewelder, of Heckewelder's life and work, and of the activity of the Moravians in the area in which the novels are sited. In this reading, Mann makes a powerful case for Natty's having been a mixedblood, so that all mythic analyses of Natty's relations with women are swept aside; the reason he rejects women is because he doesn't want to produce more obviously mixedblooded offspring. While I find Mann's Haudenosaunee interpretation compulsive, I also feel that any rich work can profitably be read along various axes.

himself in relation to the inferior values of two of the principal Others in this narrative, the indigene and the woman.

These two discoveries however exhaust the first layer of the chest and they come to a separating piece of canvas, at which Deerslayer halts. A discussion of types and categories follows in Cooper's repetitive fashion, concluding that everybody should stick to their gifts and that excessive nosiness about others is more a white than an Indian gift. The cover is removed, revealing a pair of pistols, "curiously inlaid with silver" (218). Weapons, but existing on an interface between decoration and defense, the pistols give rise to a curious episode in which Deerslayer and Chingachgook discharge the long-unattended pistols at a target, Deerslayer's blowing up in his hand, although without injuring him. Once again, it is difficult to know how to place this episode. It serves to demonstrate Judith's concern for Deerslayer (although not, of course, to Deerslayer, who remains "no great adept in the mysteries of Cupid" (237)). In terms of the thematic I am developing here however, it suggests that Deerslayer is also no great adept with the tools that a man must use in the pursuit of the mysteries of Cupid, when they are related more to the axis of Culture (decorated pistols rather than hunting weapons) than to that of Nature. After this they sit down again and go on to the next thing in the chest, which is a surveyor's tool. Now the purposes of this sequence seem to become clearer, for every item removed from the chest provides the occasion for Deerslayer to deliver a homily on one thing or another connected with his hierarchy of values. The apparel became the occasion for commentary on outer appearance and class; the pistols provided a brief statement of ethnic distinction—white people shoot better than non-white ones—while the sextant opens up Deerslayer's distaste for developers and for pioneers for that matter. More than this however, they are all the marks of another man. Henry Hutter has had as his most closely guarded secret the clothes and signs of his wife's lover. This *was* a man who was adept at the ways of Cupid, and they are perceived as intimately linked to notions of display and the ostentation of property. That Deerslayer should reject them on these terms may suggest that he reads the ways of Cupid as being far too contaminated by the operations of power and spectacle to be entered into.³

The next item is highly significant in terms of the narrative, for it contains the means by which Hutter and Hurry Harry will be freed: ivory chess pieces. At first however,

³ In terms of Barbara Mann's reading, we might see this suspicion of the interrelation of spectacle and Cupid as a misgiving that if he were to produce clearly mixedblood children his position in the spectacle would alter and the promise of Cupid thus evaporate.

Deerslayer's response appears absurd, for he thinks the chess pieces are something to do with some idolatrous tendencies in Thomas Hutter that betoken not simply moral but ethnic backsliding. Even when convinced by Judith that her father could scarcely worship things he kept wrapped up and out of sight, Deerslayer is still loathe to use them to bargain for the prisoners' lives for that would be encouraging the Huron to idolatry, on which he brooks no opposition. Eventually, however, he reluctantly admits that they may be no more than game pieces and that nothing could be better calculated to tempt the Huron to give up their prisoners, especially the pieces carved in the likeness of elephants.

This conjunction of two forms of the exotic is intriguing. The Huron are imagined to be so attracted to the delicate workmanship combined with the unknown exotic of the elephant (the image of which they are presumed never to have been exposed to), that they will willingly give up their advantage. However, the potency of the chess pieces also acts upon Deerslayer, assimilating the intensity of his response to the confidently presumed response of the Huron. And just as the narration suggests that the Huron will be in some way deceived in their overvaluation of the chess pieces in relation to the lives of the two prisoners, so also we observe Deerslayer's response, an overvaluation of the pieces' significance. These are the only two responses to the pieces we have, and in their likeness, Deerslayer is linked to the priorities of the Huron, he is revealed in his Indianness. Yet we have been positioned as readers to approve of Deerslayer, whose wisdom and sagacity on everything under the sun constantly shows up everyone around him—except in this one instance. Shortly, Deerslayer will commit an act that earns him his own disapproval, showing off with his new rifle and shooting down a bird for sport. Here, however, Deerslayer is ridiculed in front of the reader on account of his ignorance and superstition. The singularity of this event is curious and resonates with the power of everything connected with the mysterious chest, an enclosure out of which emerge objects that put to the test everyone's standards and priorities. At this point the first examination of the chest ceases.

The second examination begins after the girls' father has been killed, when Judith feels it is legitimate to examine her late father's possessions, and significantly she will only do so in the presence of the Deerslayer. The first new item they come to is a giant flag, such as might have been flown on a ship, reintroducing the theme of Thomas Hutter's previous career on the sea, supposedly as a buccaneer. This is followed by a small chest, which contains a folk-tale trio of packets of letters from which Judith intuits something of her mother's fate, an involvement with an officer from Europe (and therefore to be imagined only interested in dalliance before returning home). The first packet contains her mother's letters, the second

contains his letters, which appear to be written as "protestations of love, written with passion certainly, but also with that deceit which men so often think it justifiable to use to the other sex" (412), while the third packet contains letters between her mother and Thomas Hovey (he had changed his name to evade detection, yet another of the novel's secretcies, and his assumed name evokes the protection of an enclosing space—Hut-ter). Throughout all of these papers anything that might lead Judith to her real father has been "scrupulously erased" (414), so that she is another of Fenimore Cooper's heroines whose origins are doubtful, erased or in some way absent. And this is something they share with Deerslayer, whose origins are similarly cloudy, Cooper's work an insistent dramatisation of lost origins. However, there is a difference between those lost origins, for Deerslayer has apparently gained by having the twin origins of white "race" and Native American, while Cooper's women have been destabilized and cut away from helpful references. As Judith says after going through the chest, "I am Judith, and Judith only" (417).

THE RITE OF PASSAGE AND THE ANDROGYNOUS DEERSLAYER

The absent mother is a constant in Cooper's work, and also in many fairy tales. Marina Warner, in *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994), suggests that such fairy tales can "play to the child's hankering after nobler, richer, altogether better origins, the fantasy of being a prince or a princess in disguise, the Freudian 'family romance'" (210). For Judith, this fantasy comes true, as she learns more about her mother and real father, and yet the result is not the happy fairy tale ending, for in Cooper's simplistic moral framework for women's behavior, Judith has inherited her mother's freer approach to men, demonstrating an unsocialized body that, in its supposed or possible possession by men, renders Deerslayer's greatest horror, that of the invasion of one category, woman, by another, man.

This statement on Judith's part leads her into the discussion she has been wanting to have with Deerslayer all along, which is whether he would want to give her his name, that is, to marry her. Although "never before had so pleasing a vision floated before the mind's eye of the young hunter" (422) he ultimately feels it would be inappropriate. This refusal might lead us to summarise what has been felt in one way or another over the years, that, despite itself, *The Deerslayer* appears to render the perception that the Romantic dream of harmony with nature partly founders when men, in this case, have such difficulty in dealing with the feminine, including the feminine side of themselves. This is a landscape in which the male proves and celebrates himself through the appropriate rites of passage associated with the

adventure narrative, and as occurs in all such rites of passage it is also a landscape which threatens and which has to be survived for this celebration to take place. And in order for it to take place, men have paradoxically to hide themselves within enclosures, marks of the womanly, and thus of the frightening difference they represent for men. To use the terminology of another type of rite of passage myth, they have to descend into the underworld before they can proceed.

The Deerslayer is, more than any other of Cooper's works, a rite of passage myth. Even on the surface, it is in this novel that Deerslayer receives the rifle that will lead to his appellation as "la longue carabine" in *The Last of the Mohicans* (published before *The Deerslayer* but following it chronologically in terms of the Deerslayer's life). There is a further interesting connection between Deerslayer and Judith, in that it is in this novel that he receives from her the rifle with which he is to establish his reputation throughout the wilderness and frontier territories, the rifle which becomes one of his subsequent names, the aforementioned La Longue Carabine. This might be thought of as representing Natty's defense against not simply the Huron, but also the threat of the abject maternal. In the first place, he uses it to kill animals, or to defend himself against the (maternal) woods, as it were. With the rifle he will, in subsequent narratives (chronologically, given that this was the last of the Leatherstocking novels to be written) establish his presence as master of the woods and all of the threatening spaces he is to traverse. Put another way, it enables him to assume his phallic defense in the constitution of his identity over against the totalizing power of either the abject maternal and/or all forces that attempt to get him to commit what in his terms is category transgression.

According to speculations by neo-Freudian feminist Eva Feder Kittay, the male organ should be seen as compensating the boy in his psychic development for his inability to bear a child, so that "we might suppose that masculine flouting of phallic power is man's compensatory move for the child which does not emerge from his own body" (194). Kittay's article, "Rereading Freud on Femininity, or Why Not *Womb Envy*," is one of a tradition of responses to Freud's unsatisfactory constructions of femininity in terms of a lack. The womb cannot be construed as a lack in the same way that the female genitalia supposedly can, so that its potential as a differentiating presence becomes all the more powerful, which is precisely why feminist psychoanalysts suggest Freud swerved away from certain implications in his investigations in this area. Moreover, the womb, in its symbolic manifestations within representation, has tended to invoke deep-seated masculine anxieties related to the precise opposite of its bodily function, to the fear of reincorporation, non-differentiation and death.

Thus it is that in *The Deerslayer* to be within is not to be safe at all, but to be filled with dread, the dread of being caught and killed. Any interiority contains the potential of both safety and entrapment, of nestling within and of being unable to escape. This fear of reabsorption into the womb brings us back thus to that central anxiety in Cooper's work: the horror of non-differentiation, of category transgression, of boundaries breaking down, and thence of the abject.

The association of the landscape with both the threat of the woman as well as woman's nurturing safeness is given a further twist, however, by certain ambiguities surrounding the Deerslayer. As the template for the masculinity the outdoors life might be said to imply, it is interesting that Deerslayer may not only be the quintessential scout, at home outside, but also, in his womanly softness, a proto-androgynous challenge to the ideology of man as "form and integrity" (49), to use Creed's words. He is thus more at home inside, within the landscape as well. He is also more expert at hiding, at withdrawing from view and at making use of concealment.⁴ In the articulation of this, one of the novel's more obvious contrasts is that between the versions of masculinity represented by Hurry Harry and Natty Bumppo. The former is an assemblage of standard markers of manhood taken to their representational extremes in Cooper's mythic fashion: he is of great size, enormously strong and apparently devastatingly handsome. Yet along with these characteristics go others. He is gratuitously bloodthirsty, has no respect for Native Americans or any form of difference, and he perceives women as inscrutable but valuable trophies with whom men have nothing in common. Natty, on the other hand, is wiry and lean, not handsome, and as demonstrated repeatedly, takes women's conversation seriously and feels comfortable in their company and talking at length about the affections, the relations between men and women and morality, conventionally seen as womanly arenas. In the course of the novel he spends more time talking to them than he does to their father or Harry, diluting the typical homosocial features of the male adventure novel. With his "dark" side, as it were, safely harnessed in the form of the subservient and largely silent Chingachgook, Natty occupies what David Reynolds terms in *Beneath the American Renaissance* "the reconstructive firmness of Moral Adventure" (184) but probably in more interesting ways than Reynolds allows. Evading the claims of the abject maternal, Natty makes himself even more immune to the claims of the feminine by actually

⁴ See my treatment of the significance of hiding in general in Cooper's work, in "Who Hides in the Work of James Fenimore Cooper?" Em *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art: Papers from the 2001 Cooper Seminar*. Ed Hugh C. MacDougall. Oneonta: State University of New York, 2002: 21-25.

incorporating its central discourses, those of affectivity and morality, so that Judith is rejected by means of one of Cooper's typically twinned manoeuvres, both away from as well as towards what Judith represents as a woman.

Both a need and a restriction, both homely and encasing, enclosures in this novel provide the most intense arenas within which the characters work out their relation to the novel's important issues. Thus it is that the Deerslayer needs to dismantle the oppression of the feminine by leaving the lake, by going down the birth canal of the Susquehanna river outlet, after having proven both his masculine mastery (in his rite of passage killing of his first Native American) and after receiving the iconic rifle through which he can symbolically deal with the power of the overarching enclosure: that of the forest or the wilderness.

This doubling or contending of binary oppositions gives the novel a continual seesaw motion, as it veers from one side to another, validating first one term, then its opposite, in a reproduction of the dynamic ambiguity at the heart of the Romantic American experience of habitation and landscape. The succession of interiors which open out onto exteriors which in their turn are yet other interiors reveal a world where the Deerslayer is not exactly in control but on the thrilling edge of control, now in danger of being absorbed, now free; now in danger of being killed, now free. In this world, there are three items which present possible poles of attraction in that they are superlatively beautiful: Judith Hutter, Hurry Harry and the Glimmerglass. And in all cases they have to be negotiated with extreme care, for they are hemmed round with the danger of extreme forms of the dilution of personal integrity. Their successful negotiation, however, brings with it the reward of Natty's escape from the horrors of non-differentiation, the absorption into the/an other, and the assumption of a completely separate identity from not only the devouring archaic mother, the threatening uterus, but, interestingly, from the conventional template of masculinity as well.

The same duality could also be applied to his relation with the thrilling other of the Indian. Here also, while being outside may be grand and noble, being inside, trapped or enclosed becomes the more normal state in the narrative, to the extent that the novel becomes a thoroughly worried representation of the interpenetrations of inside and outside, interiority and exteriority, concealments and surfaces in all of its sub-texts. As such, it repays reading as more than an uncomplicated tale of masculine adventure, and rather as a tale in which the masculine relation to outside and inside, and to the inflections of these things with gender, are called into question in interesting ways.

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