

The Dystopian Illustrations in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie* and Its Importance

P.Lumenzeno^{1*}, Dr. D. Shanmugam²

1*Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu 608002, lumenzeno8@gmail.com

2 Professor, Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu 608002, shanmugam_ad@yahoo.com

Abstract:

This article examines the meaning and importance of the dystopian images and symbols used in *The Prairie* by J.F. Cooper. It also examines the distinctive features of the settings of the novel and its characteristics, as well as the methods and techniques used to depict the prairie as a post-apocalyptic landscape. The author employs these techniques in the use of maritime imagery, as well as gothic and dystopian imagery. The importance of the setting of the novel in explaining the author's attitude toward the causes and beginning of the catastrophe is also discussed in this article. It implies that humanity, rather than divine will, is to blame for the catastrophe, the extremely damaging activities and actions of human being are the leading causes of the world becoming desolate and unpopulated. The bull slaughter and the grasslands firing, are the Cooper's the most powerful and dystopian scenes which are examined in this paper to highlight this point. These scenes appear to highlight Cooper's message about the dangers and hazards of irresponsible ecological devastation. This paper argues that *The Prairie* is Cooper's the most pessimistic novel that heralds the end of Cooper's ideal fables, based on the repeated use of dystopian terms, symbols, and references.

Keywords: The Prairie, Dystopian, Bleakness, Barrenness, Doom, Desolation, Dreariness, Gloominess.

Introduction

The Prairie, by James Fenimore Cooper, was first published in 1827 and is the third of the *Leatherstocking Tales*, which tells the story of the brave frontiersman Natty Bumppo, also known as *Leatherstocking*. Unlike the other four *Leatherstocking* novels, this particular novel is not written in the author's homeland of north-eastern part of the United States of America. It takes place in the western surroundings mostly by Missouri Compromise during the Corps of Discovery Expedition's time. Cooper, on the other hand, did not travel to the American Great Plains and instead chose to write the work of fiction in France. He relied on some written accounts of the area to characterise America's remote western lands, which served as his primary source of information for his conceptualization of the lowlands. "The History of Captain Lewis and Clark's Expedition (1814) by Paul Allen and Nicholas Biddle, and Edwin James' *An Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains; Performed in the Years 1819 and '20... Major Stephen H. Long is in command*" (Mielke, 2008, p. 39). Cooper's lack of firsthand knowledge of the American West explains the implausibility

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of the novel's setting and characters. The author admits that he has never met any Indians and that his knowledge of them is solely based on historical documents. As a result, many critics argue that the author's depictions of beautiful countryside and natural landscapes in *The Prairie* compromise the novel's historical accuracy and credibility.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to trace the disaster caused by man to nature and nature to man presented in J.F Cooper's novel, *The Prairie*, concentrate on his themes and style. This research paper aims to bring out the following objectives:

1. To study the relationship between man and nature in the earlier periods of United States of America.
2. To study the human civilization through wilderness.
3. To study the elements of the novel such as grassland fire, immigration of foreigners to America.
4. To study the evil effects genocide, slaughter of animals and the earlier stages of scientific innovation which cause harm to nature.
5. To study the practical, scientific and philosophical element in the novel.
6. To study the abolition of nature and the earlier stages of human existence in New land and killing of Native People by the immigrants.
7. To study the themes present in the novel, like Bleakness, Barrenness, Desolation, Doomed Nature, Dreariness and Gloominess.
8. To bring into the focal point of varied aspects of the novelist language, experience, vision, and from a different angle.
9. To find a realistic picture of Cooper's characters portrayed by recording the changing America, social and political issues and values, in earlier periods.

3. SCOPE OF THE ARTICLE

The scope of study is varied. They are bound to be some recurring themes in James Fenimore Cooper's work. It was not easy for him to have a significant impact on American literature, nor was it easy for him to become one of the best national fiction writers of his time. It's easy to note the few themes he uses in his published works, which distinguishes and highlight his work. In the novel *The Prairie* there is a particular theme Dystopian illustrations which are some kind of disaster caused by Man to Nature and Nature to Man. Cooper novel consists of some interesting facts. American History, American Society, Nature and the Environment, Power, Brutality, and Race are common themes in all or most of his works. Family and civilization are also central themes of American culture. Nature and the world are connected to the sea and the Frontier, all of which are used. Power, aggression, and race are all linked because one theme may often lead to another. These recurring patterns can easily be linked to Cooper and can be found in the works. Cooper was the first to write a novel about etiquette. Cooper's work is often heavily influenced by nature. Many of his stories were also set in the natural environment. Natty Bumppo's five-volume epic romance is a perfect example. He portrays this character as a hunter and frontiersman, in the wilderness in most of the novels.

3.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Richard Chase (2005), in his article says that Cooper's deliberate utilisation of marine symbolism throughout the novel becomes unquestionably intentional. This incident highlights the prairie's barrenness while also emphasising its dark, rainy, and boring atmosphere. And adds that the American novel, in its most original and characteristic form, has worked out its destiny and established itself by adding an element of romance since the beginning. Chase identifies and traces this tradition through two centuries of American literature in his thorough analysis of works by James Fenimore Cooper. The Puritan melodrama of good and bad, or the pastoral idyll influenced by the American wilderness, these writers mirror the extremes of American culture through wilderness. He claims that the best novelists have found ways to use the dystopian theme through wilderness in many ways other than escapism, fantasy, and sentimentality.

MacDougall (1999), in his article claims Cooper was a pioneer of the modern environmental movement in the United States. According to Mac Dougall's article, Cooper's contribution to his novel was switching people's views of nature as well as the wilderness through the *Leatherstocking Tales*. He argues that Cooper's novel *The Prairie* also contained several common environmental ideas that are still used today. The novel promoted a view of the wilderness as gaining substantial or fundamental importance regardless of human needs and desires, which helped to raise public awareness about the need to preserve it.

Vaitiala (1998), in his article said that Cooper became one of the first Native American fiction writers to be interested in and decided to invest in the American wilderness. Cooper says that, while he is not an environmentalist in the true sense, his empathy for the healthy and well-being of the natural world is evident in *The Prairie* and other *Leatherstocking Tales*. The critic argues with him that humans are to blame for all of the unpleasant happenings in America's lands. The critic also add that Cooper was a forerunner of the environmentalism. Human civilization, according to the critic, Vailala has the capacity and ability to transform whole urban areas into deserted, isolated, and intoxicated environments, similar to the author's belief in the disappearance of the landscape in his work.

4.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dystopian Theory in Literature

A dystopia is a fictional world or culture that is unfavourable or terrifying. It's often used as an antonym for utopia, a phrase coined by Sir Thomas More and the title of his best-known book, published in 1516, which lays out a blueprint for an ideal society with little crime, violence, or poverty. However, the relationship between utopia and dystopia is more complicated than this, as many dystopias contain dystopian elements and vice versa.

Writers, tyrannical regimes, environmental disasters, and other features associated with a cataclysmic collapse in civilization are often featured in dystopian fiction. Although there are several similarities, dystopia and post-apocalyptic literature are not the same thing, and an undesirable world is not inherently dystopian. Dystopian societies appear in a variety of fictional works and artistic depictions, particularly in future-set stories. By far the most well-known is *James Fenimore Cooper's*

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The Prairie, which has outsold all of the others combined and is therefore unavoidably the starting point for any analysis of the subject.

Dystopian worlds can be used in a variety of fiction genres and they are often used to highlight issues such as culture, the world, politics, economics, faith, psychology, ethics, science, and technology. Some scholars use the concept to describe existing societies, which are totalitarian regimes or societies on the verge of collapse. Dystopias often criticise a current trend, social norm, or political structure by using an exaggerated disastrous situation.

Common themes in dystopian novels are Politics, Economic system, Class structure, Family problems, Religion, Identity crisis, Violence, Nature and Science and Technology. The political principles at the root of fictional utopias are individualistic in nature and contribute to good outcomes for the protagonists. The political principles at the root of fictional dystopias, while mostly founded on utopian values, have at least one fatal flaw and result in pessimistic outcomes for the former residents. The economic systems of dystopian societies in literature and other media vary widely, since the economy is often linked to the elements depicted as the origin of tyranny by the narrator.

The advantages of the billionaire society and the depressing life of the working class are often contrasted in dystopian literature. Religious organisations portray both victims and aggressors. The founding of the state in *The Prairie* involved chopping off the tops of all crosses in order for them to be used in a future United States governed by a Christian-based totalitarian regime.

Completely fictitious visions of the future are often metropolitan, and their victims are predominantly cut off from all interaction with nature. When walks are regarded as dangerously anti-social, they can enable their characters to avoid nature.

DYSTOPIAN THEORY IN COOPER'S *THE PRAIRIE*

Cooper's portrayal of the setting in *The Prairie* contradicts the novel's historical accuracy, but it highlights the author's creativity and invention. One of the most unusual aspects of *The Prairie*'s setting is that the novel's story and events do not take place in the thick forests, elegant woodland, and breathtaking beautiful nature for which Cooper is best known. The disappearance of primeval, magnificent, and endemic nature in *The Prairie* environment is not only unique, but also significant because it highlights the author's profound ecological consciousness and understanding. "The Prairie, like other *Leather-Stocking Tales*," writes White (2006), "remains a valuable text for ecological critique" because it is "a revolutionary text of ecological consciousness" (pp. 130-140). Cooper's major concern for man's relationship with nature in the book as well as his frequent mentions of the effects of rash settlement and human advancement, lend support to this theory. Cooper's ecological consciousness is heightened in the novel *The Prairie* by his focus on human concern for the natural world and his dependence on natural world shifts, transformations, and enhancements.

In recent years, many academics and commentators have emphasised Cooper's environmental consciousness. According to Valtiala, Cooper was one of the first Native American fiction writers to take an active interest in the American wilderness and to have a stake in the independent venture. Cooper claims that, while he is not an environmental activist in the modern sense, his concern for the health and well-being of the natural world in *The Prairie* and other *Leatherstocking* novels illustrates his environmental awareness. Cooper was "an early precursor of the Green Movement," according to

Valtiala (p. 9 Valtiala), because he presented environmental concepts and theories that were ahead of their time. This viewpoint is shared by MacDougall (1999), who claims that Cooper was a forerunner of the modern environmental movement.

Cooper's major contribution to the movement, according to Mac Dougall's post, was changing people's perceptions of nature and the wilderness through the Leatherstocking Tales. Cooper saw nature as a primal, interesting, and magnificent setting, despite the fact that it was once believed to be evil and the lair of the prince of darkness. According to MacDougall, Cooper's novels not only modified people's views toward nature, but they also included some popular concepts that are still used in the modern environmentalism. For an instance, they helped to raise public consciousness about the need to protect the wilderness by promoting a view of it as gaining significant or fundamental value, independent of human needs and desires. The author's environmental concern is most visible in *The Prairie*, where the author employs dystopian imagery and metaphors.

The Novel as an Dystopian Setting

The Novel, *The Prairie* it portrays numerous dystopian scenes and landscapes that reflect the author's vision of doomsday or how the end of the world could look in the future. It is one of Cooper's most catastrophe novel. This concept is evident from the beginning of the book, when Cooper describes the prairie setting for the story's actions and events. Cooper describes it as a dark and gloomy and solitary setting that appears to be both boring and frightening. Cooper's emphasis on the bleakness and desolation of the prairie is evident throughout the book. He refers to it as a seemingly endless waste distinguished by the "uniformity and kicking back grimness of the environment" (p.13 *The Prairie*). It appears to be a lifeless environment, with an ecosystem that emphasises its desolation and dependency.

According to the author, despite their hunger, the cattle refused to eat the limited, withered, and decaying culinary herbs or hays found in this field. Since their quest for food, water, fuel, and fodder has proven futile, the Bush family's condition is than that of their cattle. Cooper means that even the most modest agriculturist's desires require a long and exhausting journey. Ishmael Bush, despite his strength and control, is seen to be stunned and astonished by the place's hopelessness, wretchedness, and blankness. The author's use of dystopian symbols like desolation, barrenness, and grimness gives the feeling that the landscape is truly a wasteland.

Cooper's *Prairie* is bare and bleak owing to a lack of trees and vegetation. Trees are extremely rare in this region, as the author often mentions in his landscape descriptions, and one may have to drive for long stretches and see no trace of dense forests, crops, and plants. Animals, too, have a difficult time locating their wildlife ecosystems in such surroundings. Even where there are signs of green fields, the trees appear to be so few that they appear to be an optical illusion to the creature's sight.

In *The Prairie*, Cooper often refers to single trees rather than dense forests, and he describes small taproot and orchards instead of large forest areas. This region's vegetation seem to have suddenly and inexplicably vanished. Cooper's depiction of a swale of low land near one of the prairie's naked rocks exemplifies this idea. The underbrush of willows and hole in the waterbody, according to Cooper, is evidence that the area once supported a weak growth of vegetation and forest. In addition, the few

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trees that can be seen in the prairie on occasion that do not seem to be of reasonable quality.

This novel repeatedly emphasises the scarcity and unhealthy state of trees. Cooper describes the panorama throughout the spot that Ishmael and his family select as a hideout by the end of the chapter, and this is one of these situations. Because of the uniqueness of the scene and importance to the current study, a quote from Cooper's extended summary needs to be mentioned:

In exchange for the fertile gift, the water soaked into a small swale beneath the site, resulting in sparse grass growth. A single willow had taken root in the alluvion, and the tree had sent up its stem high above the crest of the adjacent rock, whose peaked summit it had once shaded. But its beauty had vanished along with the enigmatic rule of life. It remained a noble and solemn monument to former fertility, as if mocking the spot's meagre display of verdure. The tree's larger, ragged, and fantastic branches continued to protrude, leaving the white and frightful trunk exposed and storm-ravaged. There wasn't a single leaf or other sign of life anywhere near it. In every way, it asserted the inadequacy of life and the passage of time. (p.356, *The Prairie*.)

Cooper's portrayal of the ecosystem in this passage is critical for a number of reasons. On the one side, it emphasises the lack of rainforests on the prairie. Despite the fact that spring has arrived and there is plenty of water, all that can be seen is a single tree and a small patch of grass. Surprisingly, the location makes it appear to have been in the desert. Cooper's description, on the other hand, shows the difference between the historical and contemporary state of the landscape. Because of the willow tree's extensive changes and alterations, this contrast is most noticeable.

According to the author, the tree was once a strong and natural tree that clambered over the mountain just across from where it now resides, but now it is dead and also has deteriorated all of its greatness as well as majesty.

The scene is made even more frightening by the drastic changes that have occurred to the holly bush from which Ishmael wants to hang his nephew, Abiram White. Ringe a critic argues that this willow behaves similarly to shattered vegetation in Hudson River School artists' illustrations, which use these trees as representations of time, existence, and destruction, conveying this notion. In *The Prairie*, the willow tree serves to emphasise the desolation and dystopian aspects of the setting.

Cooper uses dystopian imagery to show rumpled branches of a tree and hackneyed trunk, emphasising a barrenness. The author's emphasis on the land's fertility emphasises this barrenness even more. The author claims that the willow tree serves like a valiant monument to long-ago fertility, implying that the prairie has become barren. Ishmael shows his surprise and dissatisfaction at the soil's fertility in the novel. The novel's end times theme is undoubtedly emphasised by the sterility of the land.

The Prairie's malthusian concept is emphasised not only by the lack of trees and the sterility of the soil, but also by the author's use of marine symbolism in his work. For an instance, the author states in the first few pages of the novel that the grasslands appear to be exactly like the ocean. The view's almost endless expanse emphasises the similarities between land and sea. Cooper claimed that the few trees sometimes found in the prairies are solitary vessels sailing over the water, and that Ishmael and

his family's two or three thickets from afar seem to be insulas that lie on the sea. The description by Cooper about the prairie as a withersome grass underlines even more the similarity of the land with the ocean. Indeed, land and water are portrayed as being so similar in the novel, the characters often picture themselves traveling through sea rather than travelling on countryside.

The Bush family's carts seem to be small vessels actually rolling slowly through the ocean. The author's deliberate utilisation of marine symbolism throughout the novel becomes unquestionably intentional. This incident highlights the prairie's barrenness while also emphasising its dark, rainy, and boring atmosphere. Chase communicates this concept by saying that "Cooper's marine symbolism emphasises the novel's autumnal mood" (Chase p. 57).

Through this autumnal mood, the article stresses the prairie's dystopian nature and shares his thoughts on how end of days would look in the future.

In addition to ocean imagery, the author employs a variety of other methods and techniques in the novel to emphasise the dystopian aspect of the setting. Grotesque depictions of death and desolation are among these strategies, which even the writer often uses in his illustrations of the region. According to Mani, a critic, these gothic images reinforce the novel's doomsday theme. "The scene in which Ishmael executes Abiram for the murder of his son is one of the best examples of Cooper's use of the prairie as a grotesque setting" (Mani p.63).

After leaving his brother-in-law bound by a cord that ran from his neck to a branch of a tree on the rugged rock, Ishmael assumes that he experiences indistinct cries and groans that swept through the skies and mixed with the wind. Cooper describes the deserted prairies as "Dreary and illimitable wastelands, with the wind roaring like the murmuring of a departed." (p.*The Prairie* 362).

Ishmael seems to be terrified by the ominous sounds, as he keeps looking at the execution site and believes that he senses bursts as well as a scream of terror uttered at the very portals of his ears. To emphasise the prairie's gothic dimension, the author adds dystopian imagery and words to the scene, such as terrifying, red in the face, and barbaric. According to Smith, this quasi-judicial execution scene is an example of gothic realism in which the author portrays an impact of the American imagination on "prehistoric feelings of the coarse immigrants" (Smith p. 167). Cooper utilisation of grotesque words and imagery in the current scene contributes to something like the dreariness and hopelessness of that same grasslands.

The novel's dystopian atmosphere is emphasised in a number of other important and meaningful scenes. Glanz, a critic states "A largely populated wasteland from the shores of the Maine sea to the foot of the Rocky Mountains, filled with all of the evil monsters and craft of man, completely void of the warmth and loveliness it got from the Almighty!" (D. Glanz, p. 188). The author describes it as a gloomy and haunting environment that is both boring and terrifying.

The author uses extinction terminology to emphasise the apocalyptic nature of the landscape by portraying it as a largely populated wasteland. It appears to be a barren wasteland, stripped of its earlier beauty and elegance Cooper's novel has brought back to its own earliest condition as a symbolic wilderness. Another significant scene emphasising the grassland's dystopian nature is one in which the author depicts a destination that appear to be the exact contrast of the past scenario.

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As the author explains Ishmael's quest for a reasonable location in the grasslands for his family members and cattle, for instance, the author portrays an area that has been inexplicably robbed of its inhabitants and their homes. In comparison to the previous scene, the location mentioned here is devoid of people. They seem to have vanished from the surface of the world. Whatever the scenarios have shown in particular, they mostly emphasise the the grassland's desolation and bleakness. The author's dystopian visuals, on the other hand, tend to suggest in both scenes that humankind, or indeed any other element, is to blame for the destruction.

End times Caused by External Ecological Disaster

The author's conviction that humanity is to be blamed for the western territories dystopian existence that is reflected throughout the novel. Despite the absence of visible human remains in the Great Plains, Cooper's novel consistently emphasises that humanity is to blame for the hopelessness and desolation of the Western grasslands.

This idea is best expressed in a discussion among environmentalist Obed Bat and Natty Bumppo, wherein the author argues that, however unlike deserts of Egypt and the Near East, wherein numerous artifacts and tarnishes of old and magnificent societies provide ample proof which humans are to blame for all the turmoil and devastation, the situation in the American West is distinct.

On the other side, Valtiala, a critic, disagrees with him and argues that humans are to blame for all of the harm and bad in America's plains. He claims that even if the man is to blame for the desolation of the Near Eastern regions, he should also be held accountable for the desolation in the American plains. In the New World's prairies, it's very possible that there were palaces, wealth, and an overabundance of people.

Through the character of Natty Bumppo, the author clearly opposes the concept of catastrophic occurrences arise solely as a result of divine will, as defined in the Book of Genesis, and instead implies that ecological degradation as well as catastrophe may also be primarily triggered by human civilization. In many respects, the author seems to have been inspired by the views of many Migrants to Egypt and the Near East, such as what Volney said. "the planet has been squandered by demonic genii" (Volney p. 26).

According to critic Volney, human society seems to have the potential and ability to transform whole developed areas into barren, lonely, and sterile landscapes, comparable to the author's belief in the complete extinction of the wilderness in his work.

Natty Bampoo, Cooper's narrator, expresses Cooper's belief that the disaster is caused by humans rather than divine will. *Leatherstocking Tales*, when asked about the reasons for the prairie's melancholy, emptiness, and dystopian climate, says:

It's all about their values! It is their wickedness, their vanity, and, most importantly, their waste that has caused all of this!.....And I've seen most of man's

folly; for his essence is the same whether he is born in the wilderness or in the cities. It has always seemed to me, in my feeble opinion, that his talents are insufficient to

meet his wishes. No one who witnesses his painful existential dilemmas on 'earth will deny that he would mount into the Heavens with all his deformities about him if he only knew the way. If his strength is not equal to his will, it is because the Lord's wisdom has placed limits on his evil workings. (p. 240 The Prairie)

Cooper believes that humans are to blame again for catastrophe because of their irresponsible degradation of the natural world and over-exploitation of its natural resources, as expressed by Leatherstocking's argument. The author asserts that human beings are mistakenly making the earth impoverished and uninhabitable as a result of their unethical environmental behaviour. The protagonist of Leatherstocking, who often laments the land's drastic shifts and revolutions after the arrival of the settlers on the North American continent, contributes to the world's bleak future.

The latter emphasises the Earth's bleak future by stating that he sees it all the time. The statement in the Leatherstocking novel highlights not only Cooper's uncertainty and concern for Western expansion, and yet also his criticism for settlers methods of deforming and degrading the land. "The Lord, he believes, has placed this barren tract of Great plains behind of Nations to alert men of the dangers that their folly will bring to the country" (p.24 The Prairie).

The axe has long been one of the most common tools used by settlers to devastate the environment. The author's utilisation on dystopian imagery and metaphors throughout the novel emphasises the author's dissatisfaction with the settlers' use of such an approach, which can be interpreted as a metaphor for the mechanism throughout the outdoors, as Valtiala correctly suggests.

Considering its appearance as a primitive tool that cannot do any damage or harm to the environment, the axe has proven to be a very effective and powerful weapon for settlers in carrying out their aggression and violence against nature. Cooper often mentions the utility of this small device in his accounts of the extremely damaging effect it has on the American wilderness. Cooper first describes the Bush family destroying a forest near one of very few sources remaining mostly in Western grasslands with several weapons in the first chapter of the novel.

The most memorable occurrence in the entire scene is Ishmael's firstborn son, Asa, cutting down the sycamore tree. The latter is depicted as easily severing the tree's trunk in obedience to his prowess, hiding his spear inside the tree trunk with precision, heartlessness, and resentment.

Cooper highlights their axes, defensive strength, saying that while it is less effective and more effective in destroying the wilderness, it is often more destructive and damaging to the environment than the weapons used among masters of offensive act. Cooper exemplifies this idea by explaining Asa's brothers' general attack on the remaining trees, which immediately collapse prostrate on the ground as though a whirlwind has passed through the forest, causing all of the ecological devastation.

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"Cooper's comparison of the Bushes axes success in destroying the wilderness with the whirlwind's strength emphasises his resistance to the Bushes' use of this weapon, which, as he often argues, is the primary cause of the New World's modification and deflowering," says Pikus (p. 81 Pikus). The Bushes metaphorically abused nature with the hammer, reducing it from a state of elegance and integrity to one of awfulness and degradation. While the Bushes' destruction of the aforementioned grove may have been justified by their desire to establish a camp, Cooper believes that it was an extremely unethical actions that never should have occurred.

This idea is exemplified by Natty Bumppo's melancholy and bitter smile at the clearings and vacancies in the heavens caused by the removal of tree branches, which represents Cooper's deep frustration with the Bushes' behaviour. Despite the fact that the bleakness and barrenness of the American prairies provide enough evidence and warning about what using the axe would lead the land to the protagonist, Natty Bumppo and he complains that immigrants are insensitive to the danger because they use the weapon too often.

Natty Bumppo's aversion to the axe and experience of the risks of this device whose sounds he can no longer bear can be clarified in part by his rejection of civilization and flight from eastern settlements to the western prairies. Despite his escape, the settlers chase him all the way to North America's barren plains, where "the wind seldom blows from the east, but [he] assumes the sounds of axes and falling trees are in [his] ears" (p. 24 *The Prairie*). The novel's claim emphasises the axe's negative environmental impacts, as well as the fact that White settlers on the coast of the United States had a negative impact on the atmosphere.

The Prairie attributes much of the bleak, wet, and desolate landscape of the American west to the settlers' constant use of the axe. The trees are a traumatic and frightening sight for Ishmael Bush and his kin, and they cannot bear to look at them. They seem to believe that trees are evil and that instead of being protected and left alone, they should be threatened and uprooted. They also seem to believe that forests are dangerous enemies that can only be vanquished through economically and politically.

In the depiction of Asa and his brother's attack on the sycamore tree, the Bush family seems to be conquering an adversary or hostile force rather than a single tree. The author 's utilisation of war imagery in the scenario highlights the Bush family's conflicted relationship with the natural environment. Cooper indicates that the settlers' dominant attitude throughout their colonisation of the American Continent was aggression and abhorrence of nature by emphasising gross violence and cruelty towards the sycamore tree. This attitude is at the root of the author's claim that humans may have conquered the western lands with their weapons in the distant past.

While Cooper may have been accused of exaggerating the axe's harmful and dangerous impact on the area, historical evidence suggests otherwise. During Cooper's lifetime, many people, poets, and artists, including the Hudson River School landscape painters, observed the settlers' use of the axe destroying the natural environment. The great harm and destruction caused to nature by the use of this tool disgusted and saddened Cole, Durand, Church, and other painters. In an essay published in 1835, Cole wrote, "The devastation of the hatchet are regularly rising the noblest landscapes are made barren, and sometimes with a waywardness and brutality hardly plausible in a civilised society." (Schuyler, p. 37).

As shown by this point, Cole was opposed to the use of the axe and criticized the degradation of the natural environment. Cole expresses his displeasure with the axe's use in the aforementioned article, claiming that nature's beauty is being "vandalised by what has been termed transition" (Schuyler, p. 37) and that many wild environments are now becoming shade-less and contaminated. They will be extinct in the next decade, he claims. Cole emphasised the axe's devastation of nature not only in his writings but also in many of his illustrations.

He depicts a person carrying a weapon and actually looking upon on woods he had cleared for farmland in his painting from 1843. (Hughes, 2012). The settlers' use of the hammer, according to Cole, is due to the open fields and downed trees that surround him, implying that destruction is the primary cause of the American wilderness' gradual depletion.

The catastrophe in the novel is brought about by a slew of other immoral environmental practises and actions, as well as the strong weapon of the hammer. The barren prairie landscape is "the dystopian product of men's wasty ways, basically the same ways that Natty had criticized in Templeton's pioneer settlers," according to MacDougall (p.66 MacDougall) The critic has mentioned the above lines in his book *Pioneer of the Environmental Movement*. Overuse and exploitation of environmental assets, slaughter of animals for sport and entertainment, the destruction of the ecosystem, and tampering with the beauty of the wilderness are all examples of inefficient and dangerous activities.

These practises are more prominent in other Leatherstocking novels, such as *The Pioneers and The Last of the Mohicans*, but they are also present in this novel. Cooper, for instance, expresses his dissatisfaction with the lack of biodiversity and abundance of life forms in the Western parts of United States on a regular and indirect way. Many animal extinctions, he says, are caused by pollution and overhunting. He also states that the natural beauty of the western territories was beautiful and spectacular until civilised whites poisoned and deformed it.

The author's indictment of the immigrants' belief in human dominance over the nonhuman natural world reveals his tacit critique of Christian faith as one of the primary causes of the imminent environmental crisis. He believes that Christian faith has enabled people the ability to manipulate, conquer, and overpower existence towards their own gain. For instance, Abiram's argument is Reminiscent of Genesis 1:28, which explains that it is Christ's will that man controls all other living creatures, including fish, birds, and insects.

The author of the novel, *The Prairie* claims that the Catholic faith is only capable of understanding the nature's existence, or greater chains of being, which is founded on a bureaucratic view of the world. The sequence begins with God and continues with angels, men, women, and natural objects. Man is inferior to God and the angels, but reasonable to the natural world, as his place in the chain indicates. This higher status explained why man ruled over the natural world, as well as justifying his misuse of it.

For these reasons, Catholicism is generally regarded only as underlying cause of the novel's environmental destruction. Since the immigrants believed mostly in Catholic concept of human dominance over existence, they may have used the weapon on a daily basis to conquer and restrain the nature of reality. The author's use of dystopian imagery in his descriptions of the prairie, on the

other hand, emphasises not just to his aversion to this notion, and moreover his conviction that humankind are destroying their own survival by harming the environment recklessly.

The Buffalo Slaughter and the Lowland Fire

One of the novel's most dystopian scenes is the buffalo slaughter in *The Prairie*. "Apocalyptic grandeur and horror of the spectacle," (Mani, p. 87). Natty Bumppo and his friends experience an unusual and almost mystical show of wild existence in the vicinity of the prairie's split ends while questioning the biblical account of evolution and its scientific foundation. Cooper starts by explaining the migratory bird migration, which has darkened the skies due to their sheer numbers. These birds, on the other hand, tend to be unaffected by the prairie's calm and solitude.

The stillness is broken by the massive and stampeding buffaloes, which seem to be few at first and then quickly become so numerous that the prairie herbage appears to be completely lost. And according to the author, the buffalo population is huge, and the cattle appear to be just as numerous and endless as the leaves in the woods. He equates them to bird species, referring to the scene's wildness and grandeur.

Natty Bumppo and his friends' situation becomes increasingly critical as the buffaloes charge in a straight line toward their hiding spot, posing an immediate danger and destruction. Cooper's dystopian imagery heightens the danger that the characters face in the scene. The buffaloes, according to the writer, ploughed the plain so furiously with their horns that clouds of dust shot up in little columns above the animals. A loud and distorted shouting could also be heard, as if a thousand throats vented their groans in an indistinct murmur.

Considering the reality of course about violence and suffering seem to be imminent for Natty Bumppo and his companions, they eventually escape the buffalo slaughter and avoid the dramatic consequences. Natty Bumppo spreads his arms and advances towards the pursuing buffalo after failing to divert their course with his rifle. As a result, the bisons break into two levitating streams of life, seemingly removing the characters' immediate threat. The animal's incremental approach, however, renews the danger as the dust thickness increases and distorts its shapes.

By making the buffaloes tremble and flee, Asinus, the naturalist's donkey called Obed Battius, saves them. The author's depiction of Natty Bumppo's phenomenal success emphasises the legendary creature instead of realistic aspect of the scene, but the dystopian imagery's significance primarily consists in emphasising God's goodness and omnipresence, as well as man's unawareness and helplessness. As the author explicitly states, all of the characters' actions would have been futile if Asinus had not intervened. The author appears to be implying that humans really aren't stronger or even more efficient than the non-human natural environment in this assertion.

The author indirectly criticises the settlers for their inefficient and ecologically immoral actions via the scenario of the buffalo slaughter. As soon as Natty Bumppo sees the reaching coyotes, he announces that "here a man can see proofs of his wantonness and folly." (*The Prairie*, 150). He claims that even the most strong and successful governors in any state would be unable to destroy buffaloes of higher benefit than those offered to everything on the prairie. Similarly, he cannot enjoy the

sweetness of their blood as the one who killed them according to natural rules.

The settlers' mismanagement, overexploitation, and reckless depletion of nature's wealth are highlighted by Natty Bumppo's remark. Nature appears to be protesting and defying against their selfishness and particular hypocrisy in the scene. Buffaloes' cruelty, aggression, and anger may support this theory. Cooper compares the settlers' wasteful practise of killing livestock to the Indians' hunting philosophy in his portrayal of the bison herd, emphasising the settlers' thoughtlessness.

He claims to have seen twenty to forty armed Iroquois Native Americans circling around with a severely injured bull, piercing its own flesh with a thousand bows before killing it with a confidence from the lance shortly after the slaughter ended. Cooper seemed to have been celebrating the Iroquois Native Americans for their hunting methods in his description of how this buffalo is killed. Apart from Europeans, Native Americans tend to be using the wealth of nature effectively and responsibly, promoting animal abundance rather than destroying everything.

"The novel *Prairie's* fire scene, and the buffalo slaughter, is one of the most apocalyptic in Cooper's novel because it is also a terrifying and destructive spectacle." (p.72, Glanz). The fugitives face serious risk and devastation after the Iroquois Native Americans set it on fire towards the decayed vegetation of the great plains to prevent Natty Bumppo and his friends from escaping. Natty Bumppo and his troupe appear to be doomed due to the construct enormity, and power of the flames. The author uses the following words to characterise the fire's ferocity:

“Massive columns of smoke erupted from the plain, forming dark masses across the horizon. As the flame underneath glided forward, leaving everything behind interterrible darkness, the red glow that gleamed upon their vast folds, now lighting their volumes with the glare of the conflagration and now flickering to another point”. (p.246, *The Prairie*)

The author emphasises the seriousness of the danger that Natty Bumppo and his companions face by using dystopian metaphors and symbols in his portrayal of the scene. Although the terrible silence appears to reflect the fugitives' doom, the blinding light appears to represent the location's imminent devastation. The dystopian nature of the scene, which appears to be a doomsday scenario, is emphasised by the contrast between light and dark. The author emphasises this argument by using the word “conflagration”.

The author's use of catastrophic terms and symbolism is emphasised even more on the scenerio of the grasslands fire by the author's portrayal of the conflagration's vivid and tragic consequences. Cooper reports that the fire has effectively wiped out the plant and animal life in the region. When Natty Bumppo and his companions continue their travel, they encounter several damaged plants as well as several animal carcasses.

A mutilated horse carcass, more than half eaten and lying on the grass, is among the latter. Cooper emphasises the dystopian nature of the scene by using death imagery in his portrayal of this horse. The animal's cracked body parts, blackened hide, and gleaming teeth suggest death and devastation.

The characters appear terrified and scared when they see the horse's carcass. The author

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reflects on the carcass, highlighting the fire's devastating and catastrophic consequences, saying that many winter seasons will not dwindle an animal as completely as the factor has done it in a minute. The author's comment highlights not only the fire's destructive force, but also the scene's general gloominess.

Owing to the strength of the fire and its destructive consequences, Natty Bumppo and his friends' escape seems remarkable and extremely impossible. Despite Cooper's explanation that their escape was made possible by Natty Bumppo's defense, which slowed the wildfires' advance, their existence seems to be exceptional. The protagonists have no faith in their own ability to escape imminent devastation. The aim of the author's catastrophic metaphors in the prairie fire scene, as with the buffalo massive explosion, is to emphasize God's divinity and man's helplessness.

The author specifically communicates this concept by suggesting that the fugitives' condition reveals their vulnerability and powerlessness. Also the valiant and zealous Captain Middleton admits to his weakness and helplessness, because even whenever he asks the helpless Battius for assistance and expresses his dissatisfaction with a situation where potential energy is blocked by the intervention of a superior person.

Besides that, scenes in the novel, such as the prairie fire and the buffalo slaughter, highlight Cooper's environmental consciousness. His profound concern for the non-human natural health and safety of ecosystem is expressed in his keen emphasis on the fire's ecologically damaging consequences and the extinction of many flora and fauna.

The scenes of prairie fire and bull slaughter might be interpreted as a prior warning against an imminent ecological catastrophe that would threaten, if not eliminate, human and non-human life. The author's focus on both scenes' horrifying and destructive consequences supports this theory. In these scenes, the author seems to be suggesting that the world is on the verge of being inaccessible, and that humans are jeopardising their own existence by engaging in biologically harmful and dangerous activities and actions. "The Lord knows what this world of America is coming to, and where the machinations and innovations of its people will stop," (*The Prairie* p. 250) Cooper's hero and spokesperson Natty Bumppo says concisely.

Human thoughtlessness as well as ignorance, as this argument suggests, are jeopardising the world's future. The landscapes' elegance seems to have been profoundly but irreversibly lost, according to Natty Bumppo, adds to the author's criticism of the immigrants' actions and his grim view of the future.

"The author's use of dystopian words and imagery in the scenes of the buffalo slaughter and prairie fire validates the author's argument that he depicts a view of America that is headed for doom rather than millennium in several respects." (Mani, 1980, pp. 81-92). The indiscriminate destruction of nature and the greed of a senseless democracy, according to the author, is a demonstration of the Fall, and then he believes the Land of Opportunity could transform into a hellish experience.

The author shares his conviction that the United States is moving in the right track, and he creates a portrait of man as an inconsequential being who tends to ruin any Eden offered in *The Prairie*, emphasising the writer's ideal mythology of a wilderness landscape and real Constitution of United

States of America. According to Mani, a critic, the demise of Cooper's misconception of idealised version of America signifies a change away from Jefferson's liberalism of a normal and legitimate hierarchy backed by an Agrarian Society and toward Jackson's social rule of law. "Jeffersonianism's downfall can be traced to the author's negative view of the future and conviction that America is headed for doom rather than the millennium. The character of Natty Bumppo, who becomes the stereotypical doomsday messenger, epitomises this vision of the future". (Mani, p. 92).

Natty Bumppo's failure to avoid the settlers' environmentally harmful activities and attitudes in *The Prairie* highlights the author's negative outlook. Notwithstanding Natty Bumppo's disapproval of civilisation and migration via eastern colonies to the western great plains, settlers follow him all the way to these barren lands, and the echoes of their attacks seem to have been increasing rather than diminishing. His helplessness and America's promising future are symbolised by his failure to avoid their senseless degradation of biodiversity and the rapid development of humanity.

Similarly, his repeated but unheeded warnings about the settlers' catastrophic actions emphasise the wilderness and America's doomed destiny. Natty Bumppo's reputation as a doomsayer is clear in many scenes, including one in which he forecasts that perhaps the immigrants will have to double back on their track, like a fox, and that the foul odor of their footsteps will reveal the waste's insanity. "Due to the emptiness and devastation of the western plains, Ishmael and his family are forced to abandon the prairie and flee to the cities of the east by the end of the novel." (p. 92, Martin)

Cooper's bleak vision of America's future, on the other hand, is most visible in Natty Bumppo's death by the end of *The Prairie*. The author's belief in the imminent demise of the wilderness, the fall of the American Dream, and the approach of the past rather than the millennium is reflected in Natty Bumppo's prophetic death in several respects.

5. Conclusion

Cooper's *The Prairie* is full of dystopian imagery, which he often uses in his depictions of the environment and situations. The novel's landscape is depicted as a desolate, sterile, and lonely place that appears not only desolate but also lifeless and terrifying. The region's close proximity surrounding landscape and verdure, which seems to be an endless waste, adds to its nothingness, bleakness, and sadness. As a result, the prairie in Cooper's novel might be considered a dystopian landscape, reinforcing the story's dystopian theme.

The author's use of aquatic symbolism throughout his explanations of the place emphasises this concept even more. Even those holly bushes that can be seen here as the prairie is often compared to the ocean. The dystopian aspect of the setting as well as the novel's gloomy mood are emphasised by this aquatic symbolism. Cooper's use of Gothic depictions of destruction and devastation adds to the prairie's strangeness, making it even more disturbing. Cooper uses these images to turn the prairie into a Gothic landscape filled with fear and horror for the protagonists.

Cooper claims that the desolation and dreariness of the prairie are the product of a man-made environmental catastrophe, despite the fact that they seem enigmatic and nonsensical. He believes that humans, rather than divine will, are to blame for the apocalypse, and then that human-kind seems to have the ability to destroy the nature of reality. Cooper's repeated depictions of

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the catastrophic and destructive consequences of the hammer, which the immigrants use incessantly to tamper with each other and destroy the natural world, are central to this concept. As a result of this weapon, which could be interpreted as a metaphor for the concept in the grasslands of western countries, mankind could've been accountable for such desolation and melancholy of the American prairies.

Through the character of Natty Bumppo, who complains that the improvements and modifications to the land as a result of the weapon's enormous size and depth, which seem to have been supernatural, the author often expresses his disapproval and protestation of the settlers' use of this gadget. In the other hand, he criticises the settlers in *The Prairie* not just for their use of this method, but also for a slew of other environmentally immoral and harmful practises, including over-exploitation and manipulation of environmental assets, deforestation, and tampering with nature's beauty. He criticises their individualistic view of nature, claiming that their belief in human supremacy over nature would eventually lead to an ecological collapse, rendering human and non - human existence futile.

The scenes of the buffalo massive explosion and the grasslands fire, which are among the most catastrophic in the novel due to their horrifying and disturbing spectacles, best illustrate the author's warning about humanity's thoughtlessness and folly. Both scenes depict risks and hazards that are so great and irreversible that the victims' deaths and devastation seem inevitable. Cooper's use of dystopian symbolism and words emphasises the desolation and bleakness of both scenes. The dystopian symbolism used by the author is important in emphasising God's superiority and divinity, as well as man's desperation and disempowerment.

Through the scenes of the bull slaughter and prairie burning, the author has a tendency to imply that the immigrants efforts to conquer and suppress the physical universe are not only unsuccessful, but also highly dangerous. The author suggests that the settlers are jeopardising their own existence by destroying nature and rendering the planet uninhabited wasteland. In these two scenes, the author focuses on anarchy and devastation that highlights both his criticism of the migrants' ethnocentric way of seeing the world as well as his dystopian future sight.

The novel supports the argument that it is the darkest and most miserable of the *Leatherstocking Tales*, because of the writers' recurrent dystopian imagery and metaphors. Throughout the book, the author expresses his determination that United States is on its way to catastrophe instead of the prospect, and that the American Dream may lead to disaster. He portrays humankind as imperfect creatures who have a tendency to desecrate any Eden created by their maker. As a result, Cooper's Utopian myth of a wilderness paradise and an ideal America is shattered in *The Prairie*. It also indicates a change from Jefferson's social and political philosophy to Jackson's democratic society.

Natty Bumppo's failure to avoid the immigrants' ecological toxic activities and the progression of humanity highlighted the author's cynical outlook and grim view of the future. Natty Bumppo's death by the end of the symbolises the fall of Cooper's ideals, the wilderness, miserable fate, and America's bright future in many ways.

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