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PLIGHT OF WOLVES: A READING OF THE EXTINCTION IN FARLEY MOWAT'S
NEVER CRY WOLF

DENISH RAJA DURAI.K¹, Dr. G. BASKARAN²

¹Ph.D Research Scholar (FT), School of English & Foreign Languages, The Gandhigram Rural Institute- Deemed to be University, Gandhigram- 624 302/ Dindigul, Tamilnadu.

Email Id: denishdurai@gmail.com

²Dean and Professor of English, School of English & Foreign Languages, The Gandhigram Rural Institute- Deemed to be University, Gandhigram- 624 302/ Dindigul, Tamilnadu.

Email Id: rgbaskaran@gmail.com



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Abstract

Never Cry Wolf is a first-person account of Mowat's observations on wolves in the Canadian Arctic. It was one of the first, most popularized, and most successful conservation narratives ever written, originally published in 1963. Its Russian translation, titled 'Wolves, Please Don't Cry' (literally translated into English), was essential for a Soviet prohibition on wolf hunting, saving the creatures in their native environment. Mowat's *Never Cry Wolf* earned him a huge reputation at the US State Department, which restricted him from traveling to the country. Many readers' perceptions of the wild were changed as a result of the book.

Keywords: Wolves, Life, Caribou, Killing, Enviro-centric,

Mowat was a well-remembered Canadian writer and environmentalist who lived from 1921 until 2012. He has a lengthy history of writing with earnestness and commitment to the environment. The majority of his writings are on the eco-centric. His main interest is wildlife, which is why he enjoys spending time outside. His view of nature as a valued, God-given resource with value beyond utilitarianism influenced the development of today's environmental space and ecological movements.

David Graber, who stated under the book review of *Los Angeles Times* that, "by writing *Never Cry Wolf*, Mowat almost single-handedly reversed the public's image of the wolf, from feared vermin to

romantic symbol of the wilderness" (9). Graber observed that, the narrative of Mowat, the government-hired zoologist, is one of the best modern comments on human potential to link with species and live in the natural environment. Mowat's dread of Arctic wolves is transformed by respect, and his research project becomes a self-imposed duty to save them.

Originally, Mowat wanted to write a satire on the strange "human species known as the Bureaucrat" (i). He constructed the wolf "to serve only as a foil for an exposition of homo bureaucrats" (v), who saw himself as the solely authorized bearer of ultimate truth and self-appointed judge of human

affairs. When he began writing *Never Cry Wolf*, though, he became disinterested in “bureaucratic buffoonery” (v). He became more absorbed in his other character, the wolf, without even realizing it. He says the following in the preface:

Eventually, the wolf took the book right out of my hands so that it became a plea for understanding, and preservation, of an extraordinarily highly evolved and attractive animal that was and is, being harried into extinction by the murderous enmity and proclivities of man. (i)

Mowat never let facts get in the way of the truth. It did not give him much joy at the start of the project. However, formal research subsequently verified every aspect of wolf behavior that he described, and this became a topic of immense importance. Sadly, his fundamental claim that the wolf was never a danger to other species and was not a foe to man was universally dismissed.

Later in 1972, on the recommendations of his own biologists, the Quebec Minister of Fish and Game announced a mass wolf massacre in the guise of a competition accessible to shooters from Canada and the US, with a goal of 5,000 dead wolves. Most efficient hunters were to receive special rewards. However, there was a bit of hope for the wolves. To resist the anti-wolf pressure organizations, a group of regular individuals got together. The Ontario government canceled the wolf reward in part owing to the continuous efforts of several persons who formed the Ontario Wolf League.

Similarly, the wolf advocates in Canada and the United States compelled the Minnesota government to abandon its efforts to eradicate the wolf. They had some progress in their endeavors. At this point, Mowat’s *Never Cry Wolf* states that his goal was to prevent humans from performing yet another offense towards nature: the extinction of a fellow species with a right to life. If the wolf is protected, another act of biocide will be avoided.

Several North American wolf populations, including the plains wolf, grey wolf, and red wolf, were nearly extinct in 1973. There are possibly just around 1,200 wolves left in the continental US

(excluding Alaska). About 500 of them were found in northern Minnesota, where the Quetico National Park helped to safeguard them. However, in the autumn of 1972, the Minnesota State Game Commission presented a plan in which two hundred wolves would be killed each year by rifle, trap, cage, and poisoning until the wolf threat was eradicated.

There were roughly fifteen thousand timber wolves throughout Canada’s huge expanse of the forest yet unstable regions. Unfortunately, as the usage of light airplanes has increased, a large number of hunters have been able to breach these formerly inaccessible areas, resulting in a drop in the quantity of buffalo, deer, moose, bull, and other huge species. Hunters, outfitters, guides, lodge owners, and other financially involved groups have cried out that “wolves are destroying the game - the game that belongs to us! We must act at once to destroy the wolf” (ii)

Mowat’s true involvement was in researching living creatures in their natural setting. When his friends were promised outstanding research projects, Mowat had no choice but to work for the govt. because he had hardly anything to offer the biological industry. As a result, he accepted a position with Domain Wildlife Service in Ottawa with a salary of 120 dollars. The situation in Ottawa reached its peak when he was summoned and given the following instructions by a senior officer:

“As you are aware, Lieutenant Mowat,” my chief began, “the *Canis lupus* problem has become one of national importance. Within this past year alone this Department has received no less than thirty-seven memoranda from Members of the House of Commons, all expressing the deep concern of their constituents that we ought to do something about the wolf. Most of the complaints have come from such civic-minded and disinterested groups as various Fish and Game clubs, while members of the business community—in particular the manufacturers of some well-known brands of ammunition —have lent their weight to the support of these legitimate grievances of the voting public of this Great Dominion,

because their grievance is the complaint that the wolves are killing all the deer, and more and more of our fellow citizens are coming back from more and more hunts with less and less deer. (9)

In reality, the hunters overpowered the deer, hence there were fewer deer. The Minister was called a 'liar!' and a 'wolf-lover' in the House of Commons when he made the accusation. As a result, Mowat was required to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the situation by traveling to the Barren Lands. The Keewatin Barren Lands were traversed by Mowat. He had to build a proper base for his scientific investigation, and then go by canals to make contact with the 'study species,' the wolves, as directed by the government. Getting in touch with the 'study species', on the other hand, appeared impossible unless such wolves themselves cooperated.

After reaching the place, Mowat was seeking the wolves; and he heard an "electrifying sound" (27). The howling was obviously that of a wolf pack. As a result, there appeared to be a chance of making connections with the study species. He estimated the pack size to be around 400 based on the number of sounds. He could not estimate their numbers or predict they are likely behavior patterns because it was dark. His ears were silenced by the incredible volume of howling. Then he saw wolf footprints on the ice below, but there was no wolf to be seen.

Mike, a teenage mixed Eskimo and a white guy who owned a cottage a few miles distant was discovered by Mowat. Mike took Mowat to his shelter, which had decomposing caribou skins for a roof. Mowat knew right away that it would be useful. He had a word with Mike and who agreed to let him stay in his cabin for three months in exchange for his guiding services. Mike, on the other hand, rushed out and headed north as Mowat outlined his goal. When left to his own devices, Mowat took a three-hundred-yard round around the cabin.

Caribou bones seemed to carpet the whole area surrounding the cabin. While his time in Churchill, Mowat learned that caribou was never shot by trappers. As a reason, he thought the

animals were murdered by wolves. The caribou death density was consistent, and the sample showed that wolves in Keewatin alone used to kill nearly twenty million caribou each year. As a consequence, he decided to ask Mike about it.

Mowat was ready to fall asleep when he heard strange noises again. The sounds were approaching from the north, right over the river. He started the canoe and headed for the far bank, mistaking the husky's sounds for those of a lost husky. He noticed a rocky peak from which he could see a fully matured arctic wolf. He jumped about a meter straight into the air, and the creature disappeared from view in a matter of seconds. He praised himself on the back for establishing connections with the study species.

Mowat waited the morning with great excitement. He would never forget the appearance of that huge head with its broad white ruff, narrow pricked ears, dark eyes, and grizzled muzzle. The picture of the wolf in flight was similar. He believed that he should have pursued the wolf and persuaded it that he had no hatred against its species. He wanted to travel straight to the location. Arctic wolves were the biggest of *Canis lupus*' several subspecies or races. The Govt. department had informed him that "the wolf is a savage powerful killer. It is one of the most feared and hated animals known to man, and with excellent reason." (40)

Mowat found the wolf footprints the next morning and boldly headed out on the path. He took out his binoculars and began scanning the barren countryside. He noticed something moving while he swept it. It was the tails of two wolves on their way to the top of the esker. The wolves paid any consideration to him as he made his way into the rocks. Wolves were far too engaged with their own affairs. Even though the pair had a good time, they were hungry. Eventually, the female proceeded towards a black shade that marked the cave or den's mouth.

Following his wife's departure, the male wolf observed Mowat and proceeded to the esker's ridge, where he remained facing Mowat in a tensed and aggressive posture. For fear of causing the wolf family to flee, Mowat resolved not to bother them

any further that day. He decided to pay a trip to the wolf esker and inspect the rumored lair in detail. There was no wolf's insight when he approached the esker. He imagined they were out caribou hunting for lunch. The female wolf arrived after some time, and the lair was securely hidden. In addition to the three adult wolves, there were four little puppies. The wolves were unconcerned until they noticed Mowat acting anxiously.

Mowat discovered that the human perception of wolves was a complete fabrication. When he happened to witness the wolves three times, he was utterly at the mercy of these "savage killers" (51). Even when Mowat attacked their house and looked to be a significant threat to the tiny pups, the family showed no disrespect. The incident took on a feeling of surprise. Mowat was tasked with betraying the wolves. He had accepted the assignment and was determined to follow the government's directives. His genuine interest in living things, on the other hand, provided him with quick access to expressing his actual nature. His actual underlying essence was displayed with dignity. He vowed to enter the lupine world from that moment forward and examine the wolves for what they were, not for what they were supposed to be.

Mowat got a small tent and placed it up on the bay's beach, just opposite the den esker. He placed the large telescope in the entrance to view the den at all times of the day and night. He gave the animals time to become accustomed to and adopt the tent. They eventually became oblivious to his presence and did not seem to mind his approach. Certainly, he wanted to blend in, but he was concerned with being completely ignored because his life had been so closely tied to animals up until that point. He had to research his wolf neighbors extensively. He noted that they were not migratory wanderers, but rather established creatures having a big permanent territory with well-defined boundaries.

A wolf has never encroached on Mowat's area. He had complete freedom to focus solely on the study of the species. The wolves had a well-ordered lifestyle. Learning from their familial values

ought to be great. They came to work earlier in the evenings. Their caching is particularly noteworthy. No food was ever stocked or left close to the cave. Excess remains from a hunt were taken to the cache, which was hidden in a jumble of rocks half a mile from the cave and packed into holes, especially for the nursing females who could not join the male wolves on lengthy hunting expeditions. The woman would be involved in her domestic duties. It was hard for Mowat to have an objective approach towards the wolves. As a result, he adds: "No matter how hard I tried to regard them with scientific objectivity, I could not resist the impact of their individual personalities" (61)

Mowat called the wolves after general human characters while measuring their family setup. He gave the family's father the name George. He was the type of parent that every son wishes he could claim as his own. His lady left an indelible impression. In the household, she portrayed a minx in the following order:

She hardly looked like the epitome of motherhood yet there could have been no better mother anywhere. I found myself calling her Angeline. I respected and liked George very much but I became deeply fond of Angeline, and still live in hopes that I can somewhere find a human female who embodies all her virtues. (62)

According to Mowat, Angeline and George were dedicated to one other. They never fought, and the joy with which they welcomed each other was clearly a ruse. They had a lot of affection for each other. As far as George and Angeline were concerned, the wolves' sexual practices remained a mystery to him. Following the close observation, Mowat paints a portrait of a normal wolf family, which he calls 'George,' 'Angeline,' and 'Uncle Albert.' These three, together with a litter of pups, were the focus of Mowat's story.

Mowat attributes to them a wide range of anthropomorphisms, particularly dramatic capacities to communicate among themselves and with other wolves, as well as giving them each a unique character. He adored George and enjoys Uncle Albert's pranks, but he is completely charmed

by Angeline, about whom he waxes nearly as ecstatically as if she were a 'human female.'

Only one male is allowed to mate with a wolf bitch, and they mate for life. Mowat said of human nuptial arrangements, "Whereas the phrase 'till death us do part' is one of the more amusing mockeries in the nuptial arrangements of a large proportion of the human race, with wolves it is a simple fact," (62). For more than forty years, Mike and other Eskimos had known the wolves and their lair, where generations of wolves had nurtured families.

The question of how the wolves made a livelihood was yet unanswered. His mission was to fix the problem in a way that pleased his superiors. In the Arctic Barren Lands, caribou were the only big herbivores. Their population has fallen to dangerously low levels. Available evidence from shooters, trappers, and traders seem to show that wolf hunting was the primary cause of caribou extinction.

Mowat looked for proof to satisfy his authorities, but he could not find any. He saw that the last of the migratory caribou herds had gone through Wolf House Bay during the end of June, the month of deer migration. Caribou, on the other hand, could not be the wolves' only source of food because the caribou had already disappeared. Arctic rabbits were in short supply. Birds were plenty, but because they could fly, the wolves were unable to hunt them.

Wolves also differed from otters in some ways. Their food supply remained a mystery, leaving Mowat puzzled. The wolves appeared to be well-nourished, further complicating the situation. This dilemma struck Mowat. Every night, the two male wolves went out hunting and returned every morning, but they never seemed to bring any food home. When Mowat put some bread on their hunting trail, the wolves took it as a sign of new territory.

Meanwhile, Mike's cabin was invaded by a significant number of mice. Inside Mowat's sleeping bag's pillow, a wild mouse had given birth to eleven pups. He just realized that the mice were too

responsible for the wolves' good health. It was too absurd to picture wolves living and rearing their children on a diet of mice. Yet, that was the solution to the wolves' challenge of maintaining their feeding chain.

Outside of the summer caribou zone, all of the wolves in Wolf House Bay and the Barren Land were feeding their young. They ate mostly mice for a livelihood. His studies in the subject of dietetics did not end when he discovered that the wolves' summer diet consisted primarily of mice. Three significant factors were used by Mowat to prove the mouse-wolf link. They are as follows: the wolf captured and ate mice, the modest rodent population was adequate to maintain the wolf population, and mice had a high nutritional value.

Mowat wanted to conduct an experiment to prove that a diet of small rodents would be sufficient to maintain a large carnivore in good condition. Since Mike's dogs were not around, he decided to use himself as a test subject. When his metabolic functions remained unimpaired under a mouse regimen, it indicated that wolves too could survive normally on the same diet.

Ootek, who thought wolves to be his biological relatives, aided Mowat in learning more about them. He said that wolves ate a lot of ground squirrels and that they preferred them to caribou at times. He has seen wolves fishing for jackfish or northern pike on various occasions. Small fish that hide beneath rocks in shallow water were also taken by the wolves.

Later that summer, Mowat observed Uncle Albert doing it for a portion of an afternoon. These line segments on the lupine persona were entralling. When they were talking about the function of caribou in the wolf's life, Ootek opened Mowat's eyes. The caribou and wolves shared a profound bond that the White man could not comprehend. According to Mowat, Ootek taught him:

The caribou and the wolf were so closely linked that they were almost a single entity. Ootek narrated a tale that said that the wolves would eat the sick and the weak and

the small caribou so that the land will be left for the fat and the good ones. And, this is what happened, and this is why the caribou and the wolf are one; for the caribou feeds the wolf but it is the wolf who keeps the caribou strong. (85)

According to Mowat, it is an instance of the notion of 'survival of the fittest' by natural selection. He was curious about the origins of so many large, muscular caribou skulls scattered about the cabin and across the tundra for kilometers to the north. Mike said openly that he slaughtered those deer to feed himself and his pets. Ootek went on to remark that shooting underweight caribou was pointless.

Mowat was unable to do so. To build a decent trap, every trapper, whether Indian or white, had to kill a lot of them. Caribou was also favored by dogs over salmon. They grew ill and weak from eating fish, and they were unable to carry weights. According to Ottawa's records, eighteen hundred trappers were surveyed via the fur trade firms. However, trappers and traders continued to claim that they only killed one or two caribou every year and that wolves massacred tens of thousands of deer. Mowat came up with the incredible figure of one lack twelve thousand animals killed by trappers in this region every year after a precise mathematical computation. He pushed these unsettling insights to the back of his mind and went on to conduct further research.

The wolves' familial values are not merely a model for human culture. To be honest, they have higher values than humans. Wolves, which have higher values than humans, may help people enhance many of their values. While reading Mowat's narrative, one might respect George and Angeline's strong family bonds and the depth of their love, as well as the wolves' effective use of their resources. In reality, the ideal human community has already been created by the wolves.

The wolf's family life was comparable to that of the Eskimos. They regarded puppies in the same way as Eskimos regarded children. Wolves have even taken in wolf puppies that have been abandoned by their mothers. Wolves visited other

wolves in the same way as humans visited relatives and known persons.

Mowat believed he had failed in his responsibilities. He performed a wolf census and general survey, followed by an in-depth investigation of the predator-prey connections between wolves and caribou. The wolf population was estimated to be thirty thousand by trapper-trader sources. However, he reduced the population estimate by 3,000 people. Wolves lived in packs all over the place. Before a territory became accessible, some adult wolves remained celibate for years.

When food was plentiful and the wolf population was low, bitches had huge offspring, sometimes as many as eight pups. If there were a lot of wolves or food was short, the number of wolves may be as low as one or two. Their numbers were reduced to a basic survival level during deadly epidemics of rabies, distemper, etc. Mowat emphasizes the cohabitation of mankind and other beings that lived in perfect peace after visiting the areas of wolf families. He said:

The land belonged to the deer, the wolves, the birds and the small beasts. We intruders... dominated the Barrens. Even the Eskimos, whose territory it had once been, had lived in harmony with it. All inland Eskimos vanished. The little group of forty souls including Ootek was the last of the inland people. Generally caribou seemed quite unaware of any threat of wolves. (126)

Mowat once came across a pack of wolves surrounded by deer. Each species was completely aware of the other's existence, but neither appeared bothered nor interested in it. A mature caribou, according to Ootek, could easily outrun a wolf. In the regular order of affairs, the caribou had little need to be afraid of wolves. Attempting to chase down a healthy caribou was a pointless waste of time for the wolves. Only wolves that had an opportunity to get near to a sick, injured, or inferior caribou tried to kill it.

Ootek taught Mowat that the caribou nourished the wolf and that the wolf kept the

caribou healthy. There would be no caribou if there was no wolf since they would all die as disease spread among them. He went on to say that the claim that wolves possessed an uncontrollable lust for blood and would murder everything within their range was untrue.

External and internal parasites were abundant in deer killed by wolves. They were no better than walking zoos, bound to perish. The wolves were crucial in maintaining rather than eradicating the caribou. It was unmistakable to Mowat, even if his superiors did not see it that way. He began collecting parasites identified in wolf-killed caribou when proof was needed. He created a large number of different types of individual worms and eggs from various areas of the caribou's body.

Mowat discovered that the harmful parasite's eggs were transported by even wolf scats. The findings of the scat study revealed that rodent parts were found in 48 percent of the scats, mostly incisor teeth and hair. Caribou bone pieces, caribou hair, and a few bird feathers made up the rest of the identified dietary items. Snow bunnies were also preyed upon by the wolves.

The provincial and federal governments offered wolf bounties ranging from ten to thirty dollars per wolf. Once upon a time, a trapper gathered the bounty on a hundred and eighteen wolves, including one hundred and seven young wolves. Wolves may only be killed by shooting or trapping, according to the law. This trapper, on the other hand, had disseminated rat poison to the point that it had wiped out the whole population of foxes, wolverines, and other smaller flesh-eaters.

Another strategy for killing wolves was to fire them down from the air. Whenever and wherever humans indulge in the indiscriminate murder of animals, they frequently rationalize their actions by assigning the most terrible or repulsive characteristics to the creatures. Once upon a time, a pilot got too near to the beast. The enraged wolf spun around, sprang into the air, and snapped at the skis. He lost in the accident, as did the other two guys on board. The encounter was portrayed as a demonstration of the wolf's cunning and frightening

nature, as well as the men's enduring courage. Mowat pointed:

This is a classic gambit. Whenever and wherever men have engaged in the mindless slaughter of animals they have often attempted to justify their acts by attributing the most vicious or resoluting qualities to those they would destroy: and the less reason there is for the slaughter, the greater the campaign of vilification. (156)

Anti-wolf sentiment was strong and furious at Brochet, Mowat's winter research station in northern Manitoba. According to a local game warden, the locals used to be able to shoot fifty thousand caribou each winter before two decades, but now they were lucky to kill two thousand. Caribou had become rare to the point of rarity, and wolves were blamed for it. Mowat's retort that wolves had been hunting on caribou for tens of thousands of years without harming the herds before the White man arrived in Brochet fell on deaf ears. Sportsmen and dealers murdered the caribou in large numbers, blaming it all on wolves.

Before completing his task, Mowat chose to investigate what it was like inside a wolf's lair. When he entered the den, he was surprised by two immobile wolves that were staring at him intently. He like any average guy was afraid that the animals might attack him. He had arrived too late to notice Angeline and her puppy. He was taken aback by the awareness of how easily he had forgotten and rejected his summer adventure with the wolves. He was embarrassed to discover Angeline and her puppy at the bottom of the den, where they had sought sanctuary from the aircraft's thunderous appearance.

This was the human in him that prevented him from fully appreciating the true friendship that the creatures intended to foster. The refusal to embrace the bond with wildlife is a frequent human failure. Mowat later expresses his views in the following way:

Somewhere to the eastward a wolf howled; lightly, questioningly. I knew the voice, for I

had heard it many times before. It was George, sounding the wasteland for an echo from the missing members of his family. But for me it was a voice which spoke the lost world which once was ours before we chose the alien role; a world which I had glimpsed and almost entered ... only to be excluded, at the end, by my own self. (63)

Never Cry Wolf has been criticized for being more myth than reality, which is somewhat accurate. Mowat has stated many times that he likes not to let facts get in the way of the truth, and there is little doubt that he intended his audience to fall in love with these misunderstood creatures. His main goal is to prove that wolves were not to blame for the disappearance of caribou herds.

Most of Mowat's findings are dismissed by lupinologists as entirely imagined. The reader's attitude toward the natural world will determine whether Mowat loses credibility or advances his point more effectively by ascribing so many wonderful human traits and family values to these species.

Major misconceptions about wolves as violent, roaming monsters were refuted by Mowat, who revealed them to be kind, loving, family-oriented, and typically monogamous creatures. At one time, he saw George, Angeline, and Uncle Albert caring for and training newborn pups, as well as hosting wandering packs of non-native wolves. The reader's heart is broken by the way the wolves have captured the reader's heart in the narrative's last chapter, 'To Kill a Wolf,' which describes ruthless and government-promoted wolf shooting techniques.

But it was Mowat's bravery and unusual scientific methods that really made this environmental story sparkle. He alternated between terrifying Eskimo residents and wooing them with liquor. He packed in his responsibilities like high schools pumping out a last-minute term paper until practically the conclusion of his trip, ignoring what little official process he had to observe. He learned to sleep by taking a series of 5-10 minute 'wolf-naps' every night.

Despite the fact that Mowat's encounter with wolves occurred many years ago, it can stimulate readers' attention and give extra information about a creature that requires human care. Mowat intended his story to be that of a factual record or a coming to grips with the concerning human-wolf encounter because it is a worthwhile read. It is both immensely fun and academically sound and insightful in equal measure.

Never Cry Wolf by Mowat is a fantastic resource for environmentalists looking for a window into the lives of an Arctic wolf family, as well as readers who may be unaware of how cruelly this species has been marginalized. Human invasion, unwarranted enmity, and unjustified blame, according to him, are still alive today, as is humanity's obsession with pest control in the name of profit.

To sum up, Mowat claims that people, rather than the wolf, are the main threat to the caribou species. This is now widely acknowledged, and wolf slaughter in Canada has been halted indefinitely. Killing wolves for the sake of eating caribou was, in fact, wrong. Nature's principles dictate that certain species must be eaten by others, forming the food web. As a result, humans should refrain from interfering with nature's natural processes.

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