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temper" (Zerzan 11). Faulkner's tale is ostensibly cautionary in tone as, "the hunt for the bear, if successful, will be tantamount to the destruction of the wilderness. The legends of the bear's immortality correspond, then, to the supposition prevalent in America until a little over a half-century ago that the green American continent was inexhaustible" (Altenbernd 573). It is the sense of entitlement that stems from the subjugation of the land, which through transference becomes transposed onto the notion of human slavery, greed, and ultimately modern day American capitalism. Thus for Faulkner, "the virtues of primitive society are envisioned as cures for modern ills, specifically for those of the South" (Taylor 291). It is the ownership of natural things, which ultimately belong to no individual, that create the climate of inequality that one witnesses in "The Bear"; and Faulkner's driving argument is one which is simple in its polemic — humanity is detached from the natural communality it once possessed, and it is only through the adoption of the ethics and morals of the divine, natural order of life that humanity can profoundly reconnect with itself.

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While it may be argued that the metaphysical naturalism presented in William Faulkner's short story "The Bear," is ultimately rooted in a regressive, idealized state of existence that is essentially incompatible with the story's temporal and socio-historical context — it nonetheless remains a viscerally pertinent critique of humanity's move forward into modernity and the social injustices and inequities which civilization, in all of its manifestations, is ostensibly founded upon. Thus, in "The Bear" the repudiation of civilization becomes synonymous with the renunciation of oppressive social constructs, and the natural rhythm of the wilderness provides the necessary context for humanity to rectify its evils. While from a socio-political perspective, many classical and contemporary radical ideologies share similarities with the implicit and explicit critical perspectives that become evident throughout the evolution of "The Bear," none encapsulates the emotional evocativeness of Faulkner's story more than anarcho-primitivism.

As in Faulkner's story where, "one detects a relation of his ideas to those philosophers of the past whose concepts were dependent upon a belief in natural law and natural rights, a belief especially popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (Breaden 273); so too does the socio-political philosophy of anarcho-primitivism finds its synthesis in two classically romantic, libertarian strains of thought that emerged during the same historical timeframe. Anarchism in its traditional sense is a subvariant of libertarian-socialism, as it is inherently nonhierarchical and egalitarian; and it is an ideology, "that refuses to accept an authoritarian ruling government. It holds that *individuals* should organize themselves in any way they wish in order to fulfill their needs and ideals" (Angeles 11). Primitivism is an aesthetic that grew out of the Enlightenment, which places value in the organic simplicity found in nature and the inherent freedom, mysticism, primal passion, and wisdom attributed to the natural world. As an amalgamation of these two modalities of thought, anarcho-primitivism is a contemporary socio-political theory that places civilization at the center of its critique, arguing that through its conduits, humanity is inherently oppressed as the individual has become distanced from its natural origins and existentially isolated from itself. Of the many multifaceted arguments that

anarcho-primitivism levels at civilization the main lines of reasoning usually contain critiques of the destruction of nature; the creation of and the further dependence on technology; linear temporality and its power to create finite history; humanity's increasing inability to "commune" with nature; and the logical fallacy in viewing humans as being independent from the natural schema. It is precisely these criticisms of civilization that are given aesthetic voice in Faulkner's story, and throughout the development of the plot an earnest call for "civilized" humanity to engage in self-reflection issues forth.

Within "The Bear," the most fundamental relation of "civilized" humanity to nature is the exploitation and subsequent destruction of wild areas. This monodirectional relationship achieves primacy in Faulkner's work on a multitude of levels, yet the most prominent occur as the initial hunt and the sale of the woods to the lumber company. The purpose of the esoteric hunt in which the characters of "The Bear" engage in is drastically different from the hunts in which pre-agrarian indigenous peoples engaged in, and this difference must be highlighted in depth as it underscores the oppositional views of the wild's purpose to "civilized" and "primitive" peoples. For the hunting party of Walter Ewell, Major de Spain, General Compson, and McCaslin Edmonds, the hunt is an unconscious assertion of humanity's dominance over nature. For these men nature is purely utilitarian, it is relegated to the realm of form, and it essentially becomes comodified and translated into financial value through the sale of the land for lumber at the end of "The Bear." The whole artifice of the hunt adopts an air of unreality for these men, as nature becomes something ostensibly outside themselves that they quite literally have to *travel into* only on holiday. The hunt is not an act of veneration, but rather, "it is a duel enacted within a solid set of conventions and rules, faultlessly observed on both sides" (Lewis 308). In this sense the hunting party in "The Bear" is engaging in a spectacle that has been self-defined and possesses temporal boundaries, physical rules, and appropriate conduct; thus the hunt for these men is marginalized to the point of it being nothing more than a, "yearly pageant-rite" (Faulkner 186).

In contrast to the majority of the hunting party, the hunt takes on very different implications for Isaac McCaslin and Sam Fathers. From

and the collective past of the American South. Sam Fathers is the human wisdom present in the natural world, and his plea to be let out by his master is essentially his final wish to free himself from the subjugation of the "civilized" world and die, ultimately returning to the earth of his origins. While the "civilized" world in the guise of the doctor assures the characters that Sam Fathers is fine, only Isaac has the acuity and connection to the natural world to know that Sam Fathers is about to die. He stays on, and much like the religious death rites of many indigenous peoples transference occurs. In Sam Fathers' death, the mantel is passed and Isaac becomes representative of the humanity within the natural world, binding his fate to natural ethics and values — as he proclaims, "Sam Fathers set me free" (Faulkner 286). Through the course of the narrative it becomes evident that, "the bear hunt furnishes the prologue to Isaac's attainment of spiritual maturity" (LaBudde 322); and central to this spiritual maturity is Isaac's notion of the natural inner truth: "That if truth is one thing to me and another thing to you, how will we choose which truth? You don't need to choose. The heart already knows" (Faulkner 249). Thus through the knowledge of the heart that Isaac gains in his adolescence from Old Ben, Sam Fathers, and the natural world, and carries with him into adulthood, there is no hesitation in his clarity of purpose as he finds it essential to atone for the sins of his family and his society through the renunciation of civilization's mores, norms, and laws.

Faulkner's critique of civilization gains it strength from the concession that the reversion back to a more "primitive" way of existence is an impossible ideal to achieve, thus the argument moves from the realm of it being a physical regression to the much more conceivable notion of a progression of morals. "The Bear" is not a story that suggests the oppressive conditions of civilization can be overcome through physical means, rather it is a narrative that suggests that humanity engage in a quasi-spiritual self-reflection and adopt the egalitarian communality of the natural world. It is in this sense that Faulkner's story displays anarcho-primitivist tendencies; as the hope for humanity does not arise out, "of some primitive past, some so-called 'Golden Age,' we cannot and do not want to re-implement its time or character; but we can, now, recover and cleave to its

Boon attacks Old Ben, not from a place of rational logic, but out of a reactionary impulsivity when he sees the dog that he has come to love being torn apart by the bear. Thus Boon's killing of Old Ben becomes primal, not with the impersonal guns of civilization, but the close proximity that a knife necessitates. Boon flings, "himself astride the bear as he had hurled himself onto the mule, his legs locked around the bear's belly, his left arm under the bear's throat where Lion clung, and the glint of the knife as it rose and fell. It fell just once" (Faulkner 230–231). The killing of Old Ben becomes a hypersexualized union between both aspects of nature, it is representative of the final cohesion between anima and animus, and at the end of the ordeal it leaves all four representatives of the natural world's binary opposition clinging to life: Old Ben dies immediately, Lion dies the next day, Sam Fathers is face down in the mud and dies in three days, and Boon is badly injured. The irony in this scene is that no character who fully embodies the "civilized" world takes part in this killing, yet it is precisely these characters that set the chain of events leading to this penultimate moment into motion. It becomes spectatorial for Major de Spain, General Compson, McCaslin Edmonds, and the group of sharecroppers and swampers who have literally come to be spectators as they say, "We figgered we'd come up and watch, if you don't mind. We wont do no shooting, lessen he runs over us" (Faulkner 213). Thus the final scene of Old Ben is one in which nature is pitted against nature, as Old Ben faces Lion, yet controlling the impetus of the whole ordeal is the "civilized" world who remains at a physical and metaphysical place of detachment. It is a metaphorical representation of the "civilized" world forcing nature to its will and as a consequence the natural world dies, yet tragically the "civilized" world is still not cognizant of their own interdependence with the natural world they seek to control.

Immediately after the subjugation of the natural world in the form of Old Ben and Lion's climatic scene, the extrapolation of the "civilized" world's ownership of the natural world transfers to the ownership of human beings as subconsciously Sam Fathers says to Major de Spain during their trip back to camp, "'Let me out, master [. . .] Let me go home" (Faulkner 234). Although Sam Fathers is not technically a slave, the ethos of oppression still looms in his past,

the hunt's onset, the wild is something which envelopes the being of Isaac in a quasi-mystical sense as he enters into the woods as, "the wilderness closed behind his entrance as it had opened momentarily to accept him, opening before his advancement as it closed behind his progress" (Faulkner 187). The relationship that Isaac develops with nature is one of reciprocity, as Isaac learns that he is just as much apart of the natural order of things as Old Ben is. The hunt then, for Isaac, becomes an allegorical representation of a journey into the origin of life itself. This mutual understanding Isaac develops with nature comes through his almost spiritual connection to an organic, collective unconscious not just with humanity but also with *all* nature; and this becomes evident from the narrative's beginning when it seems to Isaac, "that at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth. It was not even strange to him. He experienced it all before, and not merely in dreams" (Faulkner 187). What sets Isaac apart from the rest of the landed, plantation-owning, aristocracy and gentry is his ability to convene on a very personal level with the natural world — and this is something that Sam Fathers, who becomes his initiate into the anarcho-primitivist world, realizes from the beginning.

If the continuum of natural insight is manifested along a spectrum, then it may be argued that Old Ben and Sam Fathers are merely two different aspects of the inherent knowledge and regality of nature. Old Ben represents the infallible wisdom of non-human nature, while Sam Fathers represents the same in its human incarnation. Thus, Isaac becomes a novitiate into the worship of that which is wild, pure, and sanctified. Old Ben and Sam Fathers are ultimately the same character, as they both evoke within Isaac a respect, deference, and filial love for nature. Freedom becomes tantamount to Isaac's own understanding of self, and it is through the lessons he derives from nature that he learns that, "Old Ben is the wilderness, the mystery of man's nature and origins beneath the forms of civilization, and man's proper relationship with the wilderness teaches him liberty, courage, pride, and humility" (Stonesifier 219). Thus the hunt for Isaac is actually a medium for education in the veracity of nature as, "if Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the backyard rabbits and squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran

was his college and the old male bear itself, so long unwifed and childless as to have become its own ungendered progenitor, was his alma mater" (Faulkner 201–202). It is also important here to notice the parallels between Sam Fathers and Old Ben. Just as Old Ben is "unwifed and childless" so too is Sam Fathers without kin. Old Ben lives an intensely solitary life in the wilderness, just a Sam Fathers does not abode with the rest of the hunting party at Major de Spain's hunting cabin — instead the son of a Chickasaw chief and a black slave lives in isolation in his own small cabin at the edge of the woods. Yet in their relative seclusion both Old Ben and Sam Fathers are actually more connected to the truth of living, than the men who either out of fear or convenience live in their cabins, towns, and cities. While it may seem on the surface that both Sam Fathers and Old Ben live the lonely life of ascetic renunciates, it is precisely through this renunciation that both characters fully actualize their inherent freedom.

It is this essence of freedom that Isaac discovers on his trips deep into the wilderness, as Isaac's hunting evolves into the act of discovering the synthesis between an individual's self-identity and the immutable truth of the interconnected oneness of nature. The successive hunts portrayed in Faulkner's story depict the crossing-over from one realm of existence into another, and it is through this allegorical journey that Isaac McCaslin births a self-identity that exists in a state free from the tainted constructs of civilization, technology, and time. Throughout the course of the hunting narrative:

> "It would seem there are two worlds: the primitive world of the old free fathers — the first world — the wilderness and the animals of the wilderness and the men who live by and in and through the wilderness; and the civilized world of contemporary man who has insulated himself against the primitive world by interposing houses, societies, and material values between himself and the land, earth, nature. Ike is born into this latter world but soon learns the existence of the primitive world. Through the ritual of the hunt, he is initiated into the

to an independent humanity; rather it is a dependent humanity that is a mere part of the inextricably, interconnected oneness of nature.

The notion of the natural world being extrinsic to the functioning of humanity forms the basis for society's ills, and it is this veritable curse that takes a position of prominence in the philosophical quality of Faulkner's story. Nature is transformed by the "civilized" world into something that can be owned, sold, tamed, controlled, and ultimately destroyed. The hunting party actually *does* yearn to destroy Old Ben as an unconscious assertion of "civilized" power; as "they are under a compulsion to carry out their annual ritual at the time of 'the year's death,' to strive to conquer the Nature God whose very presence challenges them and raises doubts as to their power" (Lyndenberg 67). Of the party, it is only Sam Fathers and later, Isaac, who understand what Old Ben represents as, "to him [Isaac], they were going not to hunt bear and deer but to keep yearly rendezvous with the bear which they did not even intend to kill" (Faulkner 186).

It is of significance to note that Old Ben, is ultimately killed by Lion and Boon, for both of these characters exist in a liminal world where the "primitive" and the "civilized" become amalgamated. They are on the natural spectrum, yet whereas Old Ben and Sam Fathers represent nature's inherent wisdom and nobility, Lion and Boon represent the primal, animalistic, irrational side of nature. Lion turns out to be Old Ben's complimentary character, as he becomes the only dog that can run Old Ben and bring him to bay, as Isaac says of him, "We don't want him tame. We want him like he is [. . .] He's the dog that's going to stop Old Ben and hold him. We've already named him. His name is Lion" (Faulkner 210). As Lion is a foil to Old Ben's character it becomes essential that, "he must never be rendered a civilized dog. For Sam knows that it would be most inappropriate and downright wrong to have Old Ben, the 'God' of primitivism, run to ground by a civilized 'lap dog'" (Bell 183). In a similar vein, Boon is depicted with primal qualities, as he is "the violent, insensitive, hard-faced man with his touch of remote Indian blood and the mind almost of a child" (Faulkner 211). Thus it becomes fitting that when the mystic, divine side of nature fuses with the animalistic, irrational side — they both die, for in the final stand of Old Ben both the bear and Lion eventually perish.

"by his own will and relinquishment he had accepted not a gambit, not a choice, but a condition in which not only the bear's heretofore inviolable anonymity but all the ancient rules and balances of hunter and hunted had been abrogated" (Faulkner 198). Yet after he surrenders his weapon, he realizes that in order to be truly humble enough reconnect with the natural world, he must intentionally lose himself in its midst. Thus Isaac, "stood for a moment — a child, alien and lost in the green and soaring gloom of the markless wilderness. Then he relinquished completely to it. It was the watch and the compass. He was still tainted" (Faulkner 199). It is of importance to note that the inherent and "ancient rules and balances" set for by the "primitive" world require the novitiate to shed the last trappings associated with civilization — its own technology. The gun is a technological means to assert dominance and command subjugation all while providing a false sense of security; the gun as a tool is much like the ideological impetus of "civilized" society to control and subordinate. The watch is an explicit representation of civilization's dependence on linear time and its insistence on progress. The compass too, is an explicit representation of space and civilization's incessant need to quantify, traverse, and control the physical world. Thus Isaac must shed his security and eradicate his preconceived notion of time and space, before he can truly commune with nature in the form of Old Ben.

As Isaac truly loses himself, both physically and esoterically, his reunification with humanity's origins in the "primitive" world can finally become complete. As Isaac stands lost and bare, he witnesses the grandiosity of nature in its full force: "Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon's hot dappling, not as big as he had dreamed it but as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him" (Faulkner 200). Old Ben reveals himself to Isaac not in the conventional sense of a revelation, for Faulkner beautifully depicts Old Ben and the natural world he represents as being all-encompassing, neither here nor there, eternal; and it becomes as if Isaac merely has his obscured vision illuminated. This veritable enlightenment underscores the heart of the anarcho-primitivist argument: the natural world is not something external

> primitive world, prefers it, and decides that although he cannot completely escape the civilized world, he will repudiate its values and live in terms of primitive values." (Campbell 280)

Thus Isaac's metaphysical passage from the "civilized" world to the "primitive" world is one which is not idealized and romanticized for he acknowledges that a reversion to a "primitive" existence is impossible given the social context in which he lives. Isaac's adoption of "primitive" values happen gradually, as he slowly acquires skills and knowledge from Sam Fathers and from the wilderness itself as, "he was teaching himself to be better than a fair woodsman without even knowing he was doing it" (Faulkner 196). This idea of learning without being conscious of doing so is repeated throughout "The Bear" and it ultimately underscores the relationship of natural wisdom to an unconscious understanding that all of humanity possess.

Yet through the course of the story, it becomes clear that only those who are willing to strip themselves of their ego and engage with nature from a position of humility can tap into this collective unconscious. With the exception of Isaac and Sam Fathers, the rest of the hunting party does not posses the necessary humility to encounter the *essence* of the natural world. In a sense the humility required to connect with the "primitive" world is an act of courage, as it challenges the aspiring novitiate to confront themselves without the dependence on self-constructed barriers such as identity, class position, experience, and ownership. Old Ben, as being representative of the collective unconscious of the natural world, waits in the shadows of the woods unseen to those who are not yet worthy to behold the consecrated ethos of the "wild." Most of the hunters in Faulkner's narrative delude themselves into thinking that they are the ones doing the tracking, watching, waiting, and hunting — yet the reality is contrary to that logic, as the hunters themselves enter the realm of the wild *they* are consequently being observed and judged by nature itself. Isaac experiences this reversal in hunting roles as, "he said humbly, not even amazed: 'It was me he [Old Ben] was watching. I don't reckon he did need to come but once" (Faulkner 193). The natural world, its physical embodiment as Old Ben, and its human medium Sam Fathers, are testing Isaac to see if he

can indeed conceptualize his very existence on its interdependency with the natural world. It is those who cannot view their existence as relational and dependent on the organic world around them that are ultimately cursed to a life in which the liberty inherent to the natural world is obfuscated. It is through seeing how the natural world is structured and how it operates according to its own innate conventions, that Isaac understands that the human world has removed itself from nature and has moved from a place of egalitarianism to one of cyclical oppression.

According to the narrative of "The Bear" as well as the philosophical undercurrents of anarcho-primitivism, one of the main contributing factors to humanity's inextricable link to oppression is the epistemological notion surrounding the theory of property and ownership. According to anarcho-primitivist theorist, John Zerzan, the anthropological move from hunter-gatherer based societies to ones based on agriculture, "ended a vast period of human existence largely characterized by freedom from work, non-exploitation of nature, considerable gender autonomy and equality, and the absence of organized violence. It takes more from the earth than it puts back and is the foundation of private property" (Zerzan 197). Faulkner's story explicitly deals with the question of land ownership, and through is furthest explication by Isaac is follows that the slavery present in the American South is directly correlated to the type of intellectual justification that supports land ownership; in fact Isaac goes as far as to assert that the ownership of human beings is the *inevitable* outcome of justifying the ownership of land. While it may be contended that this line of reasoning is a slippery slope fallacy, the lengths to which Isaac attempts to elucidate his point in the fourth section of "The Bear" prove to have their foundations on sound argumentation.

Ownership is essentially an economic construct designed both to protect and increase one's fiscal interests, and land is ostensibly the means of producing the accrual of wealth. This notion is universal, as it becomes evident in Faulkner's narrative that, "land is the basis of Southern life and economy, and upon it the legend of the South has been painfully and gloriously constructed" (Breaden 273). Major de Spain, McCaslin Edmonds, General Compson, and even Isaac McCaslin are land proprietors, and if one follows the unfortunate

for its definition then temporality moves, "from time, into history, through progress, and so to the murderous idolatry of the future, which now kills species, languages, cultures, and possibly the entire natural world" (Zerzan 15). It is precisely this "progression" that creates the fallacy of an authoritative objectivity to existence, and this is what Isaac repudiates.

Isaac comes to terms with the subjective nature of time and its correlation to experience, and thus he no longer needs the security of land ownership that his wife attempts to possess through the commodification of her sexuality in section four of "The Bear." As she lies naked on the bed in their rented room, paid by a carpenter's salary, she essentially attempts to elicit in Isaac an urge to possess and, effectively, own her body. This commodification of gender is merely another parallel to the curse befallen civilization; as one group of people are subject to another solely on the grounds of race, so too is Isaac's wife captive to the notion of gender inequity. As she fails in her elicitation (for Isaac's intentions and commitment to the purity of the natural world remain unblemished) Isaac internally muses that, "she is lost. She was born lost. We are all born lost" (Faulkner 300). In these concise lines, Faulkner evokes what turns out to be a central theme in his work — humanity is lost, and yet even more tragic is the fact that humanity cannot comprehend its own separation from the natural world.

Paradoxically, it is precisely through becoming lost and acknowledging the separation between humanity and the natural world that Isaac reconnects with that from which he has been deprived. This reconnection is allegorically depicted by Isaac's first physical encounter with Old Ben. The initial encounter between Isaac and Old Ben resounds with mystical undertones, for as he embarks on the hunt that specific day, Sam Fathers, the embodiment of natural wisdom in human form, seems to prophetically know what it will take for Isaac to hold counsel with Old Ben. When faced with his socialized dependency on the technology of civilization and the unadulterated purity of submitting entirely to nature, Isaac is told by Sam Fathers, "You will have to choose" (Faulkner 198). Thus, reminiscent of many pre-Western, indigenous people's rites of pubescent passage, Isaac embarks alone into the dense woods. He leaves behind his gun,

submits himself to during the time he hunts. Yet herein, lies the paradox, the time which Isaac spends in the realm of Old Ben, is not temporally bound to the same constrictions that humanity's linear chronology is. The conception of time in Faulkner's story is non-linear both on structural and ontological levels. Structurally speaking, Faulkner crafts a narrative in which non-linear time is linked to Isaac as it follows him at age ten in part one; around the age of thirteen in part two; age sixteen in part three; age twenty-one to around age thirty-five in part four; and then ending in part five when Isaac is around the age of seventeen; all from the narrative's fictitious present. Ontologically speaking, the "primitive" world which contains Sam Fathers, Old Ben, and Isaac McCaslin is one which is free from the "civilized" conception of time. From a classically western perspective, the notion of non-linear time seems illogical and impossible to comprehend — yet, it should be noted that the linear progression of events that happen in time are what define the past, present, and future. Thus linear time presents argumentative credence for the establishment of a definitive *history*. It follows, that if existence can be depicted in a non-linear temporality, then that existence is essentially *ahistorical*.

The scenes of "The Bear" in which Isaac is completely enveloped by the natural world, represent an existence that is independent of the past or future, ostensibly ahistorical, and complete in its simultaneity. Although it is true that the narrative's events are depicted in a linear fashion and, "we are aware of strong currents carrying us forward and backward in 'The Bear,' we must also acknowledge the corollary impression that time is motionless, and everything is occurring simultaneously" (Lewis 312). Of all of the characters in "The Bear" it is Old Ben who most thoroughly embodies the immortality of the natural world as he is, "not even a mortal beast but an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life" (Faulkner 185). It is this anachronistic quality that underscores the "primitive" world in Faulkner's story, and it is essentially an implicit rejection of the "civilized" notion of linear existence. The anarcho-primitivist critique of linear time implies that time is essentially subject to objectification, and when the future becomes dependent on the past

logic of the southern gentry's justification for slavery one sees that because the title of ownership of land is recognized as possessing absolute validity, a labor force becomes necessary. Yet just as the land inherently belongs to no individual, the horrific fallacy of the ownership of human beings is made incontrovertible by the law of men. This logic concedes that, "those who claim they can sell the land, those who claim they can own the land, are cursed; for to own the land upon which a man must labor is to own the man himself, and man cannot own man, for this, too, is a violation of the natural law" (Breaden 278). It is at this point of departure that there evolves in Faulkner's work, "a philosophy or a concept of land, its ownership and its fundamental character that is brilliant and humanitarian in its vastness of scope and its depth of understanding" (Breaden 273). Isaac's position on the ownership of land seems to echo that of the anarchist philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon that all "property is theft" in the sense that land and the goods which are garnered from it are to be held communally, and it is only when the greed of humanity creates certain arbitrary claims to possession, validated by its own self-created laws, does inequality arise.

Faulkner, through the fictional voice of Isaac McCaslin reasons that the American South faces its inevitable downfall because the notion of property ownership pervades the whole ethos of Southern existence, and in doing so it in effect becomes a curse that cripples the American South economically, socially, and spiritually. Thus when Isaac is trying to justify his renunciation of the McCaslin land title to his elder cousin he says of the land that, "I cant repudiate it. It was never mine to repudiate. It was never Father's and Uncle Buddy's to bequeath to me to repudiate because it was never Grandfather's to bequeath them to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never old Ikkemotubbe's to sell to Grandfather for bequeathment and repudiation" (Faulkner 246). Central to Faulkner's conception of "the land" is the fact that it only "belongs" to the collective, and not just the collective of humanity, but even more expansive it belongs to the communality of nature as a whole.

For Faulkner, this naturalized, anarchic, view of a communal society has its roots in the divine as Isaac asserts that God, "made the

earth first [. . .] not to hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood, and all the fee He asked was pity and humility and sufferance and endurance and the sweat of his face for bread" (Faulkner 246). Faulkner's land is bountiful and provides sustenance to those who exist on it, yet when humanity attempts to commodify the land it metaphorically ceases to exist; nature becomes separate from humanity's interaction with it and ultimately it becomes a degraded insularity. Faulkner does not spare any particular group of people, and he goes on to accuse all of humanity not just white society for perpetuating the myth of land ownership. This becomes evident when Isaac seems to contend that when humanity audaciously challenges the divine right of nature it seals its own fate of oppression, just as on, "the instant when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realised, that he could sell it [the land] for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his forever, father to father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing" (Faulkner 246). Viewed in this light, Isaac's renunciation of the land to which he is entitled is a concerted effort to move his existence, which due to the circumstances of his inheritance is foundationally contingent upon a fallacy, to a more metaphysical existence rooted in the substantive essence of the natural world; it as shift from existence in "nothing" to existence in "everything."

It is because of Isaac's adolescent experiences in the primitive world of Old Ben, that he gains the clarity to later view the "civilized" life of the plantation aristocracy as being founded on "nothing." Yet this "nothing" firmly establishes very real consequences, as Faulkner contends that one of the most heinous stains on American history, that of slavery, arises from the sense of entitlement that the ownership of the land translated into the ownership of human beings. It is the construct of, "land titles, which give to man what Faulkner calls the 'legal fiction' of ownership, [that] are pictured as drenched in blood, not, necessarily, the blood of war, but the blood of those whose rights they deprive, whose labor they confiscated for the benefit of a few who 'own'" (Breaden 276). The curse of slavery is dependent on

this bleeding of humanity's natural rights, and it is ostensibly this curse that Isaac wishes to repudiate.

The McCaslin plantation ledger which Isaac stumbles upon in part four of "The Bear" is a physical record of the curse of the American South, personally relevant to Isaac's own family history. The ledger embodies a regressive temporality in which, events of slavery, human commodification, sexual exploitation, and incest exist in a static history, which Isaac absorbs and feels he must atone for through his renunciation of the land. Because of the lessons Isaac learns during the first three sections of "The Bear" he is able to recontextualize his position in a familial lineage in which the subjugation of human beings is crucial to the accrual of material wealth. He ostensibly sees his existence as merely the result of the white man's curse which was birthed in the old world of Europe, and "brought into the new land which He [God] has vouchsafed them out of pity and sufferance, on condition of pity and humility and sufferance and endurance, from that old world's corrupt and worthless twilight as though in the sailfuls of the old world's tainted wind which drove the ships" (Faulkner 248). This tainted wind carries into the birth of America, and even "the new world with its promise of a new beginning serves only to confirm the old error. Out of it, however, there slowly emerges the reverse pattern of redemption. The actual enslavement of man by man marks the final horrifying destruction of the moral order" (Vickery 325). Isaac even argues that the very justification for the perverse mentality of European-American society's claim to posses divine right to ascension and superiority — The Bible — was essentially flawed and does not reflect the ultimate truth present in the natural world because, "these men who transcribed His Book for Him were sometimes liars [. . .] because they were human men" (Faulkner 249). Isaac continuously challenges the notion of law derived from human constructs, and while he understands that he cannot revert to a time before the establishment of societal conventions, the great undertaking of his life becomes that in which he tries to synthesize an existence in society with the values and ethics present in the "primitive" world.

Central to Isaac's discovery of the values and ethics of the "primitive" world is his absolute emersion in nature, which he ultimately