Two Theories of American Literature: Insights Into Faulkner's Southern Garden

Rita Terezinha Schmidt (UFRGS)

This paper has a two-fold purpose. First, to draw a parallel between two theoretical approaches to American Literature as presented in Henry Nash Smith's **Virgin Land** (1950) and Leo Marx' **The Machine in the Garden** (1964) in order to examine how these studies, reciprocally interlocked by their concern with the master image of the American landscape, provide valuable conceptual tools for the understanding of the interdependence of literature, environment, socio-economic context and the collective imagination. Second, to investigate the extent to which some of these tools can be organized into a coherent framework which, applied to Faulkner's "The Bear" (**Go Down, Moses, and Other Stories**, 1942) illuminates the basic issues which sustain and determine its meaning.

Smith's study deals with "the impact of the West, the vacant continent beyond the frontier, on the consciousness of Americans"[1] and he explores the consequences of this impact on the literature produced about the West. His thesis centers on the argument that American society and,implicitly,western American literature in the 19th century, were shaped by the presence and awareness of a vast inland territory, so far as this territory came to embody the beliefs and the aspirations of the people and was, consequently, transformed by the collective imagination into a myth. According

ILHA DO DESTERRO, Nºs 15/16 - 1º e 2º semestres de 1986, pp.

to Smith, the American experience of the west was informed by two powerful and controlling myths: the myth of the American empire, which conceived the west as a passage to India and which entailed the dominance to the Pacific and an ocean-borne commerce with the far-east countries, and the myth of the garden, based on the assumptions of an agrarian society whose dominant symbol was "the idealized frontier farmer armed with that supreme agrarian weapon, the sacred plow."[2]

On discussing the myth of the garden, Smith explains that it was inspired by the ideal of a domesticated area, where the encroaching forces of civilization and progress would lay the foundations of an agricultural paradise. The notions of free soil and free people constituted the core of the agrarian social theory espoused by Jefferson, and were therefore, deeply colored with nationalism and democratic ideals. By mid-nineteenth century, the agrarian ideal had become an all-pervasive ideology which called for the preservation of rural virtues. As Smith puts it, it was believed that "the ownership of land, by making the farmer independent, gives him social status and dignity, while constant contact with nature in the course of his labors makes him virtuous and happy."[3] However, the agrarian ideal soon was revealed to be incompatible with the economic changes resulting from the advent of steam power, land speculation and an ever-increasing trade. If on the one hand, the farmer was regarded as an heroic figure whose toil in the land addressed a particular set of American goals, on the other he had to submit to price-markets, bankers and merchants of the rapidly-growing cities, losing thus his self-sufficiency and independence. The economic changes not only spelled out an end to the simple economy, but also gave rise to a stratified society, shattering the ideal society of the middle landscape. In Smith's point of view the disparity between the myth, as a mode of belief cherished by the Americans, and the hard facts of economic growth accounts for the failure of the myth on the social level.

In the collective imagination, the symbolic landscape of the garden was to mean a reconciliation of the opposing forces of civilization and nature, a synthesis of the conflicting images of the west; one that conformed to the assumptions of a

civilized social state moving through stages from barbarism upward and that projected the west as a wild and anarchic area to be submitted to the requirements of law and order; another one that was grounded on the primitivist ideal and was thus nurtured by the idea of benign nature, the mother-teacher of primitive ethics that counterposed the bigotry of civilized society. A mediation between these images was never attained on the imaginative level, a failure that generated both a peculiar kind of western hero and the incoherence between material and form that plagued western fiction. As Smith points out, Cooper was the only writer who succeeded in devising a viable hero who combined harmoniously a devotion to the principle of social order and responsiveness to nature and freedom. However, Cooper's thematic treatment is at odds with the pattern of the sentimental novel which he adopts. Leatherstocking's inferior social status, due to his low origins, makes him unfit for the leading role of the sentimental novel. Cooper's awareness of the nature of his hero led him to devise a younger hunter (**The Pathfinder** and **The Deerslayer**), Oliver Effingham, who is in fact a gentleman temporarily disguised as a hunter, and fit for the male lead in courtship as required by the literary convention.

The examination of Cooper's novels and heroes provides Smith with a motif for the discussion of popular culture, of how it responded to fiction and of how it became the main force that shaped the first generation of western fictional heroes. He contends that the popular imagination created a different hero from the one the writer had contrived. Expanding and distorting some of the hero's features, the reading public started to view Leatherstocking as a fugitive from the restraints of civilization and, consequently, the heroes who succeeded him became symbols of anarchic freedom. However, as "barbaric life in the wilderness held grave dangers for the ethical purity considered obligatory in national heroes;"[4] the popular writers changed the nature of their heroes by giving them a genteel interpretation. Thus, beneath the picturesqueness of the low hunter lay an upper-class individual with a perfect command of the English language. (He no longer spoke in dialect). This hero, who came to constitute the core of the dime-novels, (a genre deliberately contrived for

the mass, in Smith's point of view), objectified a collective dream which had lost its contact with reality.

The failure of western fiction is, in other words, the failure of the popular imagination to adopt an intellectual and artistic framework that would address the demands of the new circumstances of time and place. According to Smith, not only did the popular imagination move slowly towards the acceptance of the democratic ideals embodied in the image of the yeoman farmer, but it also found itself unable to provide symbols for a reinterpretation of the west in accordance with the changes that were taking place. Furthermore, the popular imagination failed both in integrating the new forces of progress with the wilderness and in getting rid of the class feelings which prevented the use of the small farmer as a viable hero.

Smith's criticism of the dime-novels which fostered national stereotypes such as Kit Carson, Buffalo Bill and Deadwood Dick, is based on what he regards as their inability to find a middle ground between nature and civilization, nature and art. Their scheme of values still conformed to the assumptions underlying the class structure that characterized the sentimental novel, which was a foreign model applied to native material. The popular writers, by having to face "a continual struggle to reconcile their almost instinctive regard for refinement with their democratic theories and their desire to find some values in the unrefined West,"[5] did not view the West in its own terms, and therefore, did not illuminate the American western experience.

For Smith, the myth of the garden blurred the distinction between the social ideal and historical reality. It functioned, ultimately, to safeguard what people wanted to believe. By satisfying their psychological needs, the myth shaped their social behavior on many levels of consciousness. Carried into fiction, the myth caused an inertia in the literary form which is far from keeping up with the dynamism of the historical process. Popular literature, on incorporating the myth, became a deceptive reflection of socio-political and historical circumstances.

While Smith deals with the impact of the West on the American consciousness and the failure of popular fiction in projecting a

possible middle landscape, Marx deals with the impact of industrialism on the pastoral ideal, an ideal that permeated the native imagination and was assimilated into the American ideology as the society of the middle landscape. His thesis centers around the argument that the pastoral ideal, transplanted from the European tradition to the American experience, became an ideological device for political use. It came to embody contradictory impulses: one that believed in the pursuit of a simple and harmonious life-style in an idyllic natural landscape; another that believed in rural happiness in a man-made cultivated land where the machine became eventually a token of meaning and value.

On investigating his argument, Marx makes a distinction between the sentimental phantasy which he calls 'popular pastoralism' and the imaginative and symbolic work which he calls 'complex pastoralism'. These two modes of consciousness, the first manifested in general culture and the latter expressed in high literary forms, have a common starting-point (the image of happiness associated with a natural landscape), but achieved different results. For Marx, sentimental or popular pastoralism was an expression of feeling rather than of thought in that it stood for an unconscious desire for withdrawal from social and technological realities. As a literary mode, it was nothing else than a variant of primitivism, so far as it tended to idealize the landscape and a way of life apart from the social process. In this way, it constituted "a romantic perversion of thought and feeling"[6].

In opposition to the popular expression of pastoralism, disseminated in the culture at large, Marx defines the concept of complex pastoralism as a modern version of an ancient literary device and which is present in the works of the classical canon of 19th century American literature. These works, defined as 'Pastoral designs' juxtaposed the ideal vision to a real world, which operated as a counterforce. By questioning, thus, the illusion of peace and harmony in an idyllic Arcadia, the pastoral design pointed towards a possible resolution of the conflict between the worlds of nature and of art, a symbolic landscape which blended myth and reality.

The counterforce in 19th century was the machine which, as an image, had a tremendous literary impact between 1840 and 1960. In order to make it clear how the pastoral mode was turned into an ideological device, and how the writers, responding to it, came to enlarge its meaning within the framework of the American experience, Marx goes to great lengths to distinguish between the pastoral ideal as an agrarian social theory, and the pastoral design.

The pastoral ideal, as expressed in Jefferson's agrarian philosophy, contained two attitudes towards the landscape: one based on the concept of Culture which, valuing work and performance, saw America as a man-made fruitful garden, and the other inspired by the desire for a more intimate contact with the wild nature. The synthesis between the natural and civilized ways, implicit at the core of the pastoral ideal, underpinned the dream of the middle-landscape, "a made thing, a fusion of work and spontaneous process,"[7] where the ploughman replaced the shepherd of the traditional bucolic setting. As a guideline for social policy, the pastoral ideal posed the middle-landscape as an area "peculiarly conducive to the nurture of the moral sense for it disseminates germs of virtue"[8] which was to be a guarantee against Europeans' vices. However, what pastoral politics could not assimilate, according to Marx, were the forces of economic growth and change epitomized in the machine, which clashed with the basic principle of the agrarian ideal. How to reconcile the middle landscape with the presence of manufacturers and mechanization? The answer rested on an adjustment of the assumption of moral superiority that underscored the agrarian ideal: the assumption that the New World had the capacity of redeeming and purifying the machine and the factory system. The machine was actually regarded as the only way by which a huge waste land could be transformed into a garden. In this sense, Marx remarks, it is easy to understand why the machine was easily assimilated by the American ideology of perfectability: it became a means of realizing the ideal of the middle landscape (a happy balance of art and nature), in what was considered to be a new golden age. At this point, Marx implicitly calls attention to the sentimental guise, the illusion that enveloped the pastoral ideal.

As its contradictions were veiled by a socio-political and ethical idealism, "it enabled the nation to continue defining its purpose as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth and power."[9]

How would the writer deal with these contradictions, how would he/she order meaning and value given the contrast between two life-styles in a context where ideal and facts were far apart? Marx answers the question by saying, first, that the writer is a 'seer' with the ability to perceive relations hidden from ordinary individuals, with the ability to disclose a vision of unity and so "help to direct the course of events."[10] In his analysis of works by Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain and Fitzgerald, Marx shows how these writers dealt with the contradiction between rural myth and technological fact and produced a distinctive industrial version of pastoralism in which the resolution was likely to be more bitter than hopeful because the inherited symbols of order and beauty have been divested of meaning. One of these symbols was the image of Virgil's Arcadia, a static, self-contained world, remote from history. By juxtaposing images of pastoral felicity with images of material reality, they restored the unity that had been ruptured by mechanized forces. Yet, as Marx underlines, this unity was only a poetic image achieved by the power of perception and aesthetic imagination. As such, it was inadequate to provide a satisfactory solution for issues pertinent to a whole culture. Nevertheless, Marx does not blame the writers for not having created a symbol-substitute for the ideal of the middle landscape. On dramatizing the strains of the American culture, they came to insights that illuminated and enriched American life in general.

As a way of summing up, we can say that both Smith's and Marx' approaches affirm the necessity to consider literature as a phenomenon within the context of the American culture. This means an inclusive view of literature and its relations with the socio-political, economic and ethical issues that shape collective life. While Smith is concerned with how the popular imagination appropriated the myth of the garden and misinterpreted the western experience, Marx is concerned with exploring the links and nature of the relationships between high literary imagination and the

transformations of the pastoral ideal in view of the country's industrialization process. Their theoretical schema converge to an interpretation of the American landscape through concepts informed by a historical dialectical perspectives: the virgin land, the garden and the machine in the garden.

Smith and Marx acknowledge the power of the myth of the garden. What Smith calls agrarianism, a social theory that stemmed from Jefferson's commitment to an agricultural economy, Marx calls pastoralism. The latter considers Jefferson's commitment to agriculture not based on economic criteria alone, but on a moral assumption: the rural virtues are the moral center of a democratic society. Both scholars point out the static quality of the myth, its inadequacy to convey the truth of the American experience when confronted with the dynamism and irreversibility of the historical process.

For Smith, popular fiction contributed to distorting reality by holding on to values totally alien to actual circumstances. The writers created an unsurmountable gap between fact and fiction, material and form, nature and art. He thus indicts popular fiction as a negative production, destitute of social or aesthetic value. For Marx, the literary imagination, characterized by an awareness of reality, provided the possibility of unity in the American experience. The pastoral design, on dramatizing the opposites that rendered the root conflict of the American culture, achieved a balance between nature and art.

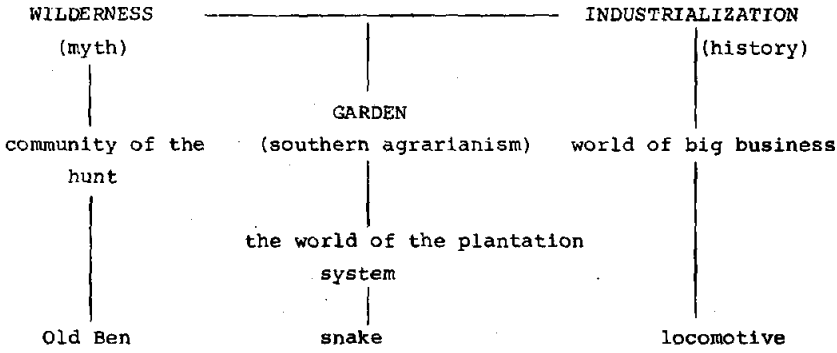
Virgin Land and **The Machine in the Garden** are extremely relevant, not only to the understanding of forces at work in 19th century American imagination,but also to the understanding of how 20th century writers have dealt with individual and social life in a context of unresolved contradictions. The complexity of Faulkner's **The Bear** poses problems of culture and value in a universe that is undoubtedly fictive, but which is profoundly linked to collective life. Because of its parabolic quality in relation to the American experience, this story invites an analysis that draws on Smith's and Marx's theoretical assumptions.

In **The Bear** Faulkner dramatizes a period of historical change that precipitated the collapse of the southern rural

economy before the advance of industrial capitalism. As a story of the last frontier of Mississippi,it captures the ethos attendant upon the gradual disappearance of the wilderness which operates as a backdrop for the moving tale of Ike McCaslin's coming-of-age. The story is divided into five sections. The seeming simplicity of the first three sections and the last is dispelled by the unflagging complication of section IV, which focuses on the McCaslin family genealogy and on Ike's explanation of the reasons for his repudiation of the family legacy. In the unfolding of the events that marks off Ike's individual life history, two issues are played out: the notion of the wilderness as a primeval land, the source of a primitive ethical purity handed over from generation to generation through the agency of the old free fathers, the Indian chief and the hunter; and the notion of culture and progress crystallized in the process of industrialization, which comes to alter, in most significant ways, society's primary relations with the land, transforming the latter into a realm to be conquered and plundered.

At first glance, the story's framework seems to be defined by the stark polarity of two wholly distinct worlds, one characterized by an idealized timeless stage pertaining to myth and ritual, and the other by a temporal linear process which is history itself. However, the very existence of the long section IV upsets this polarity as far as the unraveling of its meaning gives shape to what could be regarded as a mediation between myth and history. Whether this mediation is no more than an artificial contrivance or whether it evolves a synthesis that embodies Faulkner's ironic vision of the complexities of the south's conflict is what this brief analysis seeks to reveal.

Applying Smith's and Marx' categories, we have the following diagram:



The wilderness is invested with a mythic significance as it discloses the timeless world of a primitive ethics into which Ike McCaslin is initiated, at the age of ten, under the tutelage of Sam Fathers, an old Chickachaw descendent. In the all-male society of tribal brotherhood, Ike undergoes his apprenticeship of the mysteries of the hunt as he witnesses the contest of conflicting powers, man and nature, according to rules which did not break the cosmic spell of solidarity that impregnates the woods. The ritualized yearly confrontation with nature, which takes the form of Old Ben, the one-toed bear, promotes the image of social perfection and wholeness (we cannot miss here the bias for the masculine community) in which the criterion of experience and ability, the skills that allow the hunter to survive, replaces the one based on wealth and money. Significantly, the elements of class and blood kinship are undermined and Sam Fathers emerges as the spiritual father who bequeaths to the son a deep and personal understanding of the spirit of wilderness. Not only does Ike learn to overcome his fear of death, a basic function of the initiation rite,but he also learns humility, bravery and endurance. He then journeys alone into the wilderness where he experiences the mystic-religious identity that permeates all things. Using his intuition and consequently discarding the trappings of culture and rational logic (the watch, compass and rifle), he walks in a circle and succeeds in reaching the place where he spots Old Ben, his "alma mater;"[11]

the quintessential expression of the transhistorical natural order.

The sense of emotional fusion that underlines Ike's experience of the woods is, however, lost to him when he returns to the hunting ground at the age of thirteen. The hunting expedition organized by Major de Spain is intent, this time, on killing Old Ben as retaliation for his trespass on the property where he devoured domestic stock. The imprints of history begin, at this point, to erode the integrity of the natural order and condition the events into an irreversible process the meaning of which Ike cannot yet apprenhend: "... It was like the last act on a set stage. It was the beginning of the end of something, he didn't know except that he would not grieve."[12] The bear's natural rapaciousness is viewed as an antagonistic destructive force which justifies, from the point of view of the civilized, the overtaking of the wilderness with machine guns that ultimately come to seal its doom. Although it is Sam Fathers who engineers the death of Old Ben, in an act of self-immolation which intensifies the tragic dimension of the knowledge of his own powerlessness, the decision belongs to Major de Spain, formerly the most powerful representative of the aristocratic society of the plantation system, who becomes the willing agent to trigger off the process of transformation of nature by history. It is not surprising that he is, eventually, bought out by a logging company which assumes the role of defining the politics of domination under an economic system that emphasizes the hideous power of the machine and privileges of cash-minded manufactured men.

Once Old Ben is gone, the idyllic silence of the woods is replaced by the implacable rattling sound of the locomotive in its destructive path through woods, farmland and village. On returning, once more, to the old hunting ground, Ike, now seventeen, cannot bear the sight of the unbridled assault upon the landscape: the log-train, the steel rails, crossties and wire corrals are the signs of the exploitative progress of capitalist entrepreneurship. If the wilderness plays a role of ontological import in Ike's initiation, in that it awakes in him, both the primitive social impulse that envisages the communality of all

beings, and the intuition whereby one attains that emotional and mental wholeness which is the source of heroic aspiration and moral action, its violation entails a sense of loss that elicits his critical judgment. So, he is undivided as he realizes the social fragmentation and the ruthless individualism implicit in the construction of a society dominated by commerce and industry in which greed and corruption feed the economic web that catches defenceless people in its net: "... the wildcat manipulators of mythical wilderness... the bankers who held mortgages on the land which the first were only waiting to abandon..."[13] Ike's experience of history is too painful. His estrangement vis-à-vis what he sees makes him withdraw into the last remaining sanctuary of greenness, the place where Old Ben and Sam Fathers had been buried four years before.

At this point, the two symbols which weave the pattern of the confrontation of nature and culture deserve a closer examination because they prove to be an evidence of Faulkner's complex vision of the so-called "nature-myth". These symbols are the bear and the locomotive. From the outset, the presence of the locomotive foreshadows the end of the Old Ben (as his death intimates the death of Sam Fathers). The bear is described as an anachronism but oddly enough, in many instances, he is described in terms that evoke the machine: "the ruthless and irresistible deliberation of a locomotive, the shaggy tremendous shape;"[14] "it rushed through rather than across the tangle of trunks and branches as a locomotive would;"[15] "the thick locomotive-like shape."[16] The obvious discrepancy between the natural force and the technological one is neutralized by the juxtaposition that points to the overlapping of the categories of nature and culture. Old Ben, with his one trap-ruined foot, the most often mentioned physical trait, does not embody the pure state of primeval nature but is himself contaminated by the very antithetical order that wants his destruction.

However, the anomalous perception that blurs the distinction beast/machine is absent in the long descriptive narration of the last hunting scene. The simile that compares the bear to a falling tree restores the oppositional character of the symbol, a symbol that encodes the ritualized reenactment of a reality

that predates Ike's initiation and which has kept its mythic contours throughout history. The imagery thus reconstitutes the wilderness, though subjugated, as a separate entity. In fact,it remains for Ike an idealized paradigm of the past which survives in his subjectivity and consciousness as a young man. He carries over Leatherstocking's legacy as far as he regards Nature as bountiful and moral, a state where landownership, and by consequence, class relationships, are not problematical. For Faulkner, nature is the embodiment of the primitivist ideal that ideologically, stands the impact of the head-long rush of capitalist development. Despite the early ambivalence, the text asserts the social and ethical values that inhere in myth in a world that, ruled by capital, believes in its power no more.

Given this context, some questions may now be raised: where is the symbolic landscape that, according to Marx' views, promotes the blend of myth and history? Is the reconciliation of opposites, nature and culture, out of the question in Faulkner's vision? Where is the garden? On discussing the myth of the garden in book three of **Virgin Land**, Smith points out that the myth encompassed two versions:western agrarianism and southern agrarianism. Whereas the west was regarded as a sanctuary of freedom and equality (free soil and free people), the south held on to the plantation system defined by slave labor and later, by sharecropping, the two elements that allowed the plantation to resist, at least for some time, the changes brought about by the new economic system imposed by capitalism which culminated during the 30's, with the collapse of the rural economy and the flight of the work force to northern industrial cities. Antagonistic to western agrarianism based on Jeffersonian values, the southern garden constituted a world apart, proud of its traditional status, a society supported by rigid distinctions based on caste and race. In the period post-Civil War, sharecropping came to replace slavery as the mode of production. Consolidated, as time went by, as the most durable form of production, it became the dominant agrarian mode. The aristocratic mansion gave way to the commissary which, as the seat of labor control, represented the perpetuation of the power of the patriarchal genealogical family of white landowners.

The function and meaning of section IV of **The Bear** becomes

clear when one considers, first of all, its centrality in terms of a middle landscape that mediates the contradictory categories of myth and history. However, though the text plays with the notion of synthesis, it generates another feature which is not readily apprehended unless one has learned to work under the assumption that Faulkner's works, as a rule, are not likely to provide easy resolutions for the problems they posit. It is not surprising, then, that Faulkner craftily reserves to the reader the awareness that mediation becomes a coded form of the historical impossibility of a middle landscape in the context of southern agrarianism. Ike surveys the ledgers of the plantation commissary before his twenty-first birthday, and this leads him to the ghastly discovery of the burden of family history. Painfully guiltridden, he realizes the abominable role played by his grandfather, Carothers McCaslin, who committed both incest and miscegenation with his black slave daughter, and who would not recognize his black son because of the dual transgression which gave him life. Ike also learns about Carothers' two sons who, in an attempt to expiate the family guilt, freed the slaves and gave them the manor house while they slept in a log cabin. While the system of blood relationship transcribed in the papers points to the white male descendent (Ike McCaslin) as the rightful inheritor of the title to the land thus excluding the black branch of the family on the basis of race and caste, it also reveals the true nature of his inheritance: guilt of the past and the responsibility for atonement.

On the one hand, the ledgers unlock a synchronic pattern of family-generated evil, which lies at the rock bottom of the southern dynasties. Since the southern planters "were all grandfathers;"[17] they were the pivotal elements of a story that parallels, structurally, the original cosmogony of creation. Wrestling a plantation from wilderness as the ruthless violator of land and people, McCaslin reenacted, in a secular version, the creation myth, becoming thus, the prototype of all founders. On the other hand, the ledgers place the plantation within the movement of historical change for they not only trace the diachronic history of an individual family including the fate of

Carothers' black grandchildren who, excluded from the inheritance, leave the plantation to make a life of their own, but also intimate the transformations operating on the system of relationship and on the socio-economic basis upon which the southern garden stood. The commissary, as the center of the plantation life, calls forth the basic change in the mode of production from slave labor to sharecropping and the consequent introduction of money economy within the plantation. The more money landowners accumulated, the more powerful and prestigious they became. Carothers' greed and pride informed his decision to bequeath, in his will, a thousand dollars to his black infant while thinking that, by that time, he would be dead and so would not have to pay. McCaslin Edmonds' voice of reason when trying to dissuade Ike from relinquishing his inheritance,which to his mind is nothing but a form of family and class suicide, perpetuates the power and vanity of the white landowner,the sin that has tainted the land since Old Carothers "got the land no matter how...."[18]

Within this mode of perception, Ike's family is the genealogical-mythic family of the south whose history is unravelled in "that chronicle which was a whole land in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire south."[19] The history of his family is, thus, a metonymic paradigm of the history of the southern plantation. The configuration of the plantation emerging out of the ledger papers projects it, then, as a space where the timelessness of myth and historical process converge to encompass the truth of a social reality that subverts the ideal classless society postulated by the agrarian social theory. The contradiction between nature and culture is not really solved but rather levelled out by the authorial vision that renders discernible the embryo of disaster and suffering within the garden: landownership. According to this vision, a title of ownership secure the right to submint the land to the full exercise of man's mastery and will, making it possible for individuals like Carothers McCaslin, inspired by pride and greed for possession rather than by a desire for melioration of life, to emerge and build a plantation in which basic codes of human decency and ties of common humanity are denied. The relentless

image of exploitation — of land and of people — that charts the history of the plantation positions the text in a direct confrontation with the central tenet of agrarianism, that is, the individual's natural right of the land, and it implicitly crystallizes an indictment of the form which landownership, in the south, secured the establishment of the powerful hegemony of a white patriarchal aristocracy: slavery.

The symbolic dimension of the southern garden is actualized in the snake image of the last section of the story in a scene that describes an episode that took place years before Ike's coming-of-age. The fact that the account of this episode is strategically and intentionally placed in the end of the story endows the image with a meaning that escapes Ike's perception but not the reader's. The texture of its symbolism not only removes all hopes from the garden as an embodiment of the pastoral ideal but also renders Ike's useless struggle to deny his legacy all the more excruciating. The scene describes Ike's encounter with a six-foot rattle-snake as he is leaving the spot where Old Ben and Sam Fathers had been buried. Imitating Sam's gesture in the past when he had saluted a great buck in the forest, Ike greets the snake in the Indian language: "Chief... Grandfather." Whereas Sam had saluted the living spirit of the wilderness, Ike greets the spirit of corruption and mischief. In his mind, he acknowledges the nature of "the old one... fatal and solitary... evocative of all knowledge and of old weariness and of pariahood and of death."[20]

The image summons up the mythic symbol of evil associated with the loss of the Edenic garden, which substantiates the argument that views it as the most adequate symbol of a garden in which human action has aborted the possibility of goodness and wholeness. In addition, it is associated with the historical experience of evil as far as the knowledge of family genealogy is intimated by Ike's recognition of kinship. That a snake should be addressed as 'grandfather' is one of those textual tricks that Faulkner plays on the reader, a trick in which meaning depends more on what the reader can make of the interplay of different temporal contexts than on the context of the event itself. Granted this, the snake image emerges with full symbolic force,

the force of bitterness and hopelessness. It points to the linking chain of experience in the garden which has destroyed its possibility as a viable social world of meaning and value, the society of the middle landscape. Furthermore, it underscores the tragic nature of Ike's plight: while he can relinquish his inheritance of money and land in order to expiate his guilt, he cannot, however, erase his origins and deny kinship with the children of his half-black brother. The contextual irony of the image registers the impossibility of redemption, either on the collective or on the individual basis. It is springtime, the dawn of life, but the snake (and what it stands for) arrests the movement towards freedom and rebirth. Ike's grieving helplessness bursts out in the end of section IV: "We were all born lost."

Unlike Huck Finn who is able to take off for the territory, Ike has nowhere to go. An idyllic retreat into the primitive and natural existence in the wilderness is no longer possible because nature has to yield to the destructive and possessive settlers, as part of an ongoing inevitable civilization process. The city, with its money-hungry bankers, the "nameless horde of speculators in human misery"[21] is the locus of all that is unwholesome and is thus incompatible with Ike's principle of integrity and truth. And the plantation is the blighted world of shame and sorrow where the pastoral ideal has never loomed as a possibility given the circumstances of man's willfulness and action upon land and people. On repudiating the land, Ike withdraws from society and, eventually, seeks peace in a rented room in Jefferson city while he hopes to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood,"[22] by earning his bread with the sweat of his brow. His attempt to evolve the code into which he had been initiated during his childhood into a philosophy of life that envisions ideal relationships with fellow beings and with the land is, however, shot through with a deep irony that undercuts the effectiveness of his moral and ethical stand and exposes the contradictions of his embattled spirit. For one thing, the values by which he abides cannot be realized in the impersonal urban environment. Nowhere else but in the city the gap between the real world and his inner self seems wider and unsurmountable. His gesture of atonement which eases the burden

of his consciousness is but a lonely gesture that is lost in the alienating and busy world around him. Himself homeless and uprooted in the city, Ike is blind to the redeeming power of personal relationship. Confined within the boundaries of his ego, he believes he can live up his own private code apart from people. Accordingly, he abdicates responsibility for a choice that would give his marriage a sense of purpose, and the price he pays for the inadequacy of his vision the reader can readily infer. His passivity comes to represent an escape from woman, from conflict, from life. Ike McCaslin prefigures the modern individualist American hero who takes the risk of loneliness so as to feel free.

In **The Bear** Faulkner dramatizes issues and conflicts that are deeply embedded at the core of the American culture. According to Leo Marx, by incorporating in literary works the root conflict of the culture, the American writers (Faulkner is included here) "have clarified our situation. They have served us well."[23]

NOTES

[1]Henry Nash Smith, **Virgin Land** (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,1950), p.4.

[2]Smith, 138.

[3]Smith, 141.

[4]Smith, 92.

[5]Smith, 260.

[6]Leo Marx, **The Machine in the Garden** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964),p.10.

[7]Marx, 112.

[8]Marx, 131.

[9]Marx, 226.

[10]Marx, 242.

[11]William Faulkner, "The Bear," in **Go Down Moses** (New York: Random House, Inc., 1942),p.210.

[12]Faulkner, 226.

[13]Faulkner, 287.

[14]Faulkner, 193.

[15]Faulkner, 211.

[16]Faulkner, 238.

[17]Faulkner, 283.

[18]Faulkner, 252.

[19]Faulkner, 293.

[20]Faulkner, 330.

[21]Faulkner, 291.

[22]Faulkner, 257.

[23]Marx, 365.