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Bradley Parrigin

Violence, Language, and the Natural World: Finding 'Nature' in Faulkner and McCarthy

I. Introduction

William Faulkner's "The Bear" has often been cast as a lamentation of the loss of wilderness and the natural world. Indeed, the story and the novel *Go Down, Moses* as a whole portray a wilderness that is giving way to the demands of civilization. But this view accords a privilege to the natural world, assuming that it is of some higher order than civilization, that it ought to be preserved on account of its more impressive credentials.

The critical works on Cormac McCarthy do not present the same issue; he is not cast as a preserver of much of anything other than some forms of modernism. Still, his work very much focuses on the relationship between man and land. *Child of God*, in particular, seems to brim with the struggles between man and wild. Nonetheless, an argument could be made that McCarthy privileges the natural world by virtue of his lush depictions, the pauses in the text to marvel at a ribbon of frost among weeds or the mating of hawks.

This paper moves past such arguments, hypothetical or otherwise, and presents the argument that the texts privilege neither the natural world nor civilization, instead according privilege only to the ever-present violence. If the texts hold open a sort of mystical space for a pure essence of something beyond the grasp of the noumenal world, it is not a space for the majesty of the wilderness, it is a space for a type of truth that promises only a brutal existence for both civilization and the natural world.

II. Theoretical Framework

This paper uses a few terms in ways that are specific and sometimes at odds with common usage. These following words function as terms of art: *violence*, *nature*, *natural world*,

and *civilization*. Each will be defined in turn, and further usage will be contained to that definition.

For the purposes of this paper, “violence” will be defined so as to be more inclusive than its traditional usage. Though, as a term of art, it will retain traditional acts of violence, such as inflicting physical injury, rape, and murder, it will connote the exertion of dominion of one entity over another. For example, violence will encompass the enforcement of social hierarchy, the threatening appearance of the woods, or the struggle to survive a cold night. Opening up the definition in this way allows inanimate entities to commit acts of violence. This will be one of the ways that the natural world can commit acts of violence against man. Violence will also include any event that results in the fragmentation, decomposition, or destabilization of an entity. In this way, rusted cars, storm-split trees, and ungrammatical sentences can all serve as evidence of violence. The purpose of refashioning this definition is to unencumber the concept of violence of its predominant anthropocentric usage and shift focus to occurrences and consequences of the various “invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, [and] ploys” that interested Michel Foucault (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 139).

“Nature” will be defined as the metaphysical origin or essence often sought by western philosophers, the objective of *Ursprung* as derided by Nietzsche and Foucault (NGH 140-41). Equally important is what the term does not include: the natural world, the woods, the fields, the birds, the hills, etc., unless such depictions happen to be intended to act as signifiers of nature as defined above.

The woods, the fields, the birds, the hills, the weather, time, and all other depictions that are intended to act as the bastions of the world undespoiled by human occupation will be encompassed by the term “natural world”. The natural world is not only a geographical place, but also signifies a natural order, the processes that carry on without human initiation or intervention: the decomposition of a corpse, the same storm-felled tree, the same types of decomposition that constitute violence. Though there are theoretical problems with the concept of a truly natural world existing independently of civilization,¹ it will serve as the foil to efforts of man to tame the Earth.

“Civilization,” on the other hand, will take on a more expansive definition to include not only cities and arts and laws, but will also include all manner of rituals, hierarchies, and

¹ See Evans. He says, “there has never been a point when the lay of the land was not shaped by human interests and intentions, and the concept of the natural landscape is incomprehensible apart from the culture that defines it as its own opposite, which constitutes it by designating particular pieces of geography as noteworthy, investing them with symbolic significance, and enabling their social use or appreciation” (180).

inventions that derive from the volition of man. This means that civilization, as defined, includes the cultivation of the land, burial rites, roads, and economic transactions.

With these terms suitably defined, it is now safe to proceed to lay the theoretical framework that will guide the analysis that follows without the excessive use of “scare quotes” or italics.

John T. Mathews, in *The Play of Faulkner’s Language*, applies the deconstructive theories of Jacques Derrida to a number of Faulkner texts in order to find meaning in the “play” of difference of “systems of articulated significance—games, economies, rituals, writing, [and] speaking” (31). Mathews, in arguing against logocentrism, says “speech and writing similarly depend on the particular kinds of absences, differ from their desired objects, and defer the expectation of full reappropriation” (28). The equation of speech to writing is a metaphorical way of undermining the very idea of “presence” as the basis for the sign and the signifying system that comprises all human communication (29). This (reductively summarized) foundation allows Mathews to mine Faulkner’s texts with an eye toward absences in Faulkner’s articulations, which yields rich insights on the themes of loss and mourning, free of the expectations of unearthing some kind of universal truth behind the text.

This paper is indebted to the work of Derrida for the freedom to work without a metaphysics of “presence,” and even more directly to Mathews for his close analysis of Faulkner’s language through this unconventional prism. However, where Mathews’s analysis focuses on the representation of loss and the necessary loss that comes from representation, this paper is more concerned with discontinuities, ruptures, and power relations. For these concepts, Foucault’s genealogy provides the most apt framework.

Foucault first explores power relations in a 1971 essay discussing his relationship with his influences, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”² (“NGH”), the purpose of which was to refine the term “genealogy” (which will be defined shortly) as it applied to the practice of history (“NGH”). He elaborates upon these power relationships in a series of interviews, running from 1972-77 and published in 1980 as the compilation, *Power/Knowledge*. These ideas are applied during the same period and after in his major works *Discipline and Punish* and the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality*.³

² Collected in *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice* (1977).

³ This paper primarily analyzes the concepts as discussed in the aforementioned “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and Morals” and two interviews in *Power/Knowledge*: “Truth and Power” and “Power and Strategies.”

“Genealogy” is a term that only lends itself to a concise definition at the risk of being overly reductive. Still, as a rough working definition, “genealogy” may be described as the search for descent (“NGH” 145) or emergence (148), strictly in opposition to a search for “origin” (140), that seeks to oppose reality, identity, and truth, through the use of parody, dissociation, and sacrifice, respectively (160). This definition contains terms that must be defined, in turn, and then must be set to the task of examining the effects of power and knowledge.

In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Foucault speaks directly to the usage and context of genealogy. Genealogy, he says, operates on a field of “entangled and confused parchments” (139). It has one indispensable restraint: it must record the “singularity” of events without according them any “monotonous finality” (139). Primarily, genealogy opposes itself to the search for origins, or, refining a term from Nietzsche, “*Ursprung*,” which is a German term that connotes a “miraculous origin sought by metaphysics” (“NGH” 140, citing Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*). Instead of seeking some “inviolable essence” to be found at the historical beginning of things, it seeks the disparities, series, discontinuities, divisions, and differences; in short, *Ursprung* explores the “details” and “accidents” that accompany a “beginning” (“NGH” 142-43).

Instead of seeking *Ursprung*, genealogy focuses on descent (*Herkunft*) and emergence (*Entstehung*) (“NGH” 145, 48). Genealogy follows the complex course of descent, not to reify ancient affiliations or bonds or traditions or social classes, but to maintain fleeting events in their “proper dispersion,” taking note of the accidents, deviations, and errors that gave birth to these values (145). The goal of an analysis of descent is to disturb and fragment those faulty unities (147).

Likewise, emergence is not a “final term” or a historically destined conclusion, but merely the “current episode in a series of subjugations” (“NGH” 148). Genealogy seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection (148). Analysis of emergence delineates the interactions, struggles, and attempts to maintain or regain strength through division of opposing forces (148-49). Its focus is a “non-place” which indicates that adversaries do not belong to a common space, and which problematizes the possibility of claiming responsibility for the emergence of a form of domination (150). From this chance struggle, not from some metaphysical essence, are liberties, laws, logic, and morality derived (150). The effect of genealogical analysis is to demystify the abstract “truths” behind these monuments and to record them as simply the emergence of different interpretations of events on the stage of historical process (152).

To paraphrase the above, genealogy uses *Herkunft* and *Entstehung* to remove the privilege traditionally accorded to certain causes and effects, respectively, by various historians, philosophers, metaphysicians, ideologues, and other progenitors and propagators of thought. But how is genealogy used in daily practice? Foucault cites three uses, each of which corresponds to and refutes a Platonic modality of history (“NGH” 160). First, Foucault cites the parodic use of history, which opposes the modality of reality, the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition (160). This is done by pushing the masquerade of the historian-constructed unreality to its limit (160). Second, Foucault cites a dissociative use of genealogy to combat identity, that history which is given as continuity or representative of a tradition (160-61). Genealogy rids us of our parodic, historical mask (161). Third, genealogy may be used sacrificially in opposition to truth, history as knowledge (160). This reveals the mask of history (the mask that claims to be neutral and devoid of passion) as merely the will to knowledge, which is full of instinct, passion, cruel subtlety, and malice (161). In essence, we use genealogy to remove the superficial veil of objectivity from knowledge by satirizing, rupturing, and destroying.

Once genealogy reveals that “truth” and knowledge are not objective universals, but the products of instinct and domination, we can see that the effects of power and knowledge are interweaved (“Truth and Power” 109) (“TP”). As the tools of *Herkunft* and *Entstehung* demonstrate, discontinuities are often the richest sites for genealogy. By focusing on discontinuities, we can see that history is less like a language and more like a battle, that it consists of relationships of power and not of meaning (“TP” 114). Though history has no “meaning,” it is intelligible, and proper analysis should be sufficiently detailed as pertains to the struggles, strategies, and tactics that emerge (114). Genealogy is a form of history which can account for the constitution of discourses without having to make reference to transcendental or empty subjects (117). This is the benefit that genealogy has over ideology, as ideology must always refer to a subject that is always in virtual opposition to something else that is supposed to count as the “truth” (118). In this way, ideology is always enmeshed with the effects of power. Also entangled with the effects of power is repression (118). And like ideology, repression is inadequate for capturing the productive aspect of power because it frames power solely in the negative, prohibitive sense, ignoring the type of power that produces pleasure, knowledge, and discourse (119).

This positive⁴ aspect of power expands the concept of power beyond sovereigns and authorities who prohibit or regulate certain behaviors, opening the door to view the effects of

⁴The term “positive,” as used in this paper and by Foucault, is not intended as a value judgment of the effects of power. Instead, it is a term that denotes a distinction from power that is exercised to prohibit certain behaviors.

power as inherent in social norms and myths to which we submit without even acknowledging. Instead of framing power relations as an adversarial match between sovereign and subject, the debate can take form the metaphor of battle, a warlike conflict between competing ideas (“TP” 122-23). This allows us to see power not as a derivative of truth, but truth as a construction that is produced and transmitted by those apparatuses that have power (131-32).

Mathews had to adapt Derrida’s theories, which were meant to “problematize asserted meanings” in philosophic texts, so that they could account for literary texts that welcomed the “disestablishment of truth” (Mathews 24). The same must be done with Foucault’s genealogy, which most readily combats the asserted universal truths inherent in traditional histories, moralities, and ideologies. The texts of Faulkner and McCarthy both seem to welcome the refutation of such totalities rather than establish their own. For this paper, genealogy is best used as an analytical tool that justifies focusing on the “non-places” where adversaries square up for conflict, the points in the text where the natural world emerges victorious over civilization, where civilization emerges victorious over the natural world, where forces compete in a warlike conflict. Instead of seeking to establish a demonstrated privilege accorded to the natural world or to civilization, this paper can wallow in the texts’ refusals to offer up such a privilege.

III. Analysis of the Texts

Moments of violence are the focus of this paper. Both “The Bear” and *Child of God* are rife with such moments, multiple in form, but ever-present. The worlds in these texts are worlds of uneasy existences. Man coexists uneasily with both civilization and the natural world. Though both Isaac McCaslin and Lester Ballard prefer the natural world to the conventions of civilization, they are never perfectly at ease in the natural world, nor are they ever able to shake off the trappings of civilization for very long. Both the woods and Old Ben provide a constant threat to Ike’s safety. Similarly, the Appalachian wilderness in which Lester Ballard thrives always threatens to take his life. And even when Ike intends to immerse himself in the natural world, he relies on mechanized vehicles to reach it, and he is rarely for long without his watch, compass, or rifle. Lester Ballard is outright contemptuous of many of the trappings of civilization (property law, authority, sexual norms), yet he will only on rare occasion part with his rifle and he spends most of the text lugging around a collection of stuffed animals won at a local fair. This uneasy existence is often depicted in moments of violence.

The positive refers to the fact that it produces a certain type of behavior, irrespective of any concerns of whether the consequences are interpreted as “good” or “bad.”

In addition to the moments of violence between civilization and the natural world, and the moments of violence in which each entity preys upon itself, the medium of the text offers another level at which violence can become manifest, the level of language. As Mathews points out, Faulkner often arrests the reader's attention to accent the "exercise of invention" endorsed by the passage through misusage or neologisms, framed by Mathews as "kindly violences performed by the writer on the common tongue" (15). This concept can be expanded to encompass syntactical deviations in the text as well as jarring structural shifts from one section to the next. Faulkner and McCarthy never use violence against language arbitrarily; it always signifies the presence of another struggle.

The empirical analyses in the following sections of the paper are structured primarily on the basis of the targets of the violence. This structure thematically represents the idea that no entities in these texts are safe from violence. Section III.A will begin with the most value-neutral violence: that against language. Section III.B will analyze the various moments of violence in which the target is the natural world, and Section III.C will analyze the moment in which the moments of violence target civilization.

A. Violence Against Language

In "The Bear," the kindly violence that occurs most often is the sentence that runs on far beyond the accepted bounds of convention, sometimes for a number of pages. One such sentence begins on the very first page of the text:

It was of . . . hunters . . . with the will and hardihood to *endure* and the humility and skill to *survive*, and the dogs and the bear and deer juxtaposed and relieved *against* it, ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unremitting *contest* according to the ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter; . . . the men who had *slain* it sitting before the *burning logs* on hearths . . . (Faulkner 181, emphasis mine)

The pronoun "it" that begins the sentence refers to talk that Ike has heard of the big woods. As the italics emphasize, this passage uses the attention it draws to good effect: it encapsulates all types of other conflict. The hunters, these men of civilization, must "endure" and "survive" the woods. The dogs, the domesticated animals, with one foot in the natural world and one in civilization, and the bears and deer, creatures exclusively of the natural world, are all juxtaposed and relieved "against" the big woods. The interaction of the hunt, which involves all of the above, is a "contest" which is officiated by some even higher order of the

natural world. The hunters have “slain” some of the woods and burnt the carcasses of the trees. Immediately, the text resists according privilege to either civilization or the natural world. All entities are at risk of violence. Hunters kill animals and chop down trees, yet even they must survive the woods. The creatures of the natural world are not only threatened by the hunters but by the natural world itself. And though the rules of the contest are attributed to a higher order in the wilderness, the rules apply to man and creature equally.

Another run-on sentence is equally ambivalent:

Corn cribs broken down and rifled, of shoats and grown pigs and even calves carried *bodily* into the woods and *devoured* and *traps* and *deadfalls overthrown* and dogs *mangled* and *slain* and *shotgun* and even *rifle shots* delivered at *point-blank range* yet with no more effect than so many peas blown through a tube by a child -- a corridor of *wreckage* and *destruction* beginning back before the boy was born . . . sped . . . with the *ruthless* and irresistible deliberation of a locomotive. (183)

Again, evidence of violence is all about us, and it does not discriminate between civilization and the natural world.

Perhaps the most notable moments of violence toward language occur outside of the big woods, in Section Four. This section, in which Ike and Cass discuss Ike’s renunciation of his inheritance, the renunciation itself an act of violence against several conventions of civilization (property ownership, patrilineal descent, the accumulation of wealth), consists primarily of run-on sentences. However, this section also demonstrates other forms of violence against language.

The section itself begins with a “then,” the “t” meaningfully left uncapitalized (241). Faulkner opens many of the following paragraphs with uncapitalized letters as well. The “then” itself is an act of violence on the structural level. “Then” implies the continuation of a sequence, which means that something must have come before, yet this is the opening of the section, the section itself disruptive in its abrupt change of time and setting. The gap between the end of Section 3 and the beginning of Section 4 is so vast that it does violence to the idea of narrative chronology.

The text also litters the run-on sentences with excessive repetitions in the form of Cass’s “Ah”s or the dialogue attributions of “and he” and “and McCaslin” that are set on separate lines from the dialogue that they are meant to attribute (another subverted convention). These repetitions imbue the text with a droning, uncomfortable rhythm that effectively reflects the destabilizing effects of the utterances themselves, the renunciation of the plantation.

Within the section are even nested incidents of violence to language in the ledgers, attributed to the near illiteracy of Buck and Buddy. “Drownd herself” (254). “yr stars fell Fathers will” (255). The text refers to old Carothers’s will in exposition, stating that it capitalizes everything but follows no rules of punctuation or construction (256). Each of these incidents of violence to language is layered over violent content: Eunice’s suicide in reaction to old Carothers’s rape of her (and his) daughter, the incest that birthed Tomey’s Turl, the death of Carothers himself. The first two, suicide and incest, are acts of violence against both social convention and the natural order.

Child of God also showcases acts of violence against language. Elevated diction, a discontinuity from the more earthy diction that prevails, always precedes some horrific act of violence. In Part II, the following sentence interrupts a paragraph that has been operating to mostly describe Ballard’s actions: “In the black smokehole overhead the remote and lidless stars of the Pleiades burned cold and absolute” (McCarthy 125). The unusual adjective “lidless” signals the elevation in language. The stars “burned cold,” an oxymoron. And the Pleiades refers to a star cluster by its proper name, temporarily effacing the character of Lester Ballard, who doesn’t even know what stars are “made of” (133). The rest of the short section follows Ballard as he shinneys through a narrow passageway to emerge in a cavern, where he “turn[s] his light on ledges or pallets of stone where dead people lay like saints” (127). The section ends with this chilling image.

This is a pattern that occurs throughout *Child of God*. Not only does elevated language immediately precede an act of violence, but it also tends to efface Ballard momentarily. For example, a section toward to end of Part 1 begins with the following two sentences:

The hounds crossed the snow on the slope of the ridge in a thin dark line. Far below them the boar they trailed was tilting along with his curious stifflegged lope, highbacked and very black against the winter’s landscape. (65)

Ballard is nowhere to be found in this passage, and it does not even refer to his vantage point. The first sentence resorts to figurative language, signaling elevated diction. The second sentence contravenes typical syntax by moving the subject away from the beginning of the sentence. The second sentence also has two neologisms -- “stifflegged” and “highbacked” -- two other acts of violence against language. The passage continues to describe the hunt without any reference to Ballard: “[The boar] kept turning, enmeshed in a wheel of snarling hounds until he caught one and drove upon it and pinned and disemboweled it.” (McCarthy 66) Here not only is the language elevated with terms like “enmeshed” and “wheel of snarling hounds” but it is also strung out past its natural ending point with a series of ands. Notably, the

content of the sentence has begun to turn gruesome. In the next sentence, Ballard is finally introduced:

Ballard watched this ballet tilt and swirl and churn mud up through the snow and watched the lovely blood welter there in its holograph of battle, spray burst from a ruptured lung, the dark heart's blood, pinwheel and pirouette, until shots rang and all was done. (66)

The introduction of Ballard does not signify the end of the heightened language, though it creates a discontinuity between how the near-illiterate Ballard would describe the scene to which he is witness and how the text describes it. Further, the beautiful language itself creates a discontinuity between its form and its content; a grotesque scene of death and violence is described with the beauty of a ballet. Here we have violence against language with its inscrutable metaphors, its contrasting content, and its distance from its subject. This jarring moment forces the reader to pause and understand the tensions at play. Elevated language also precedes the murder of a young girl (112), the narrow escape of an intended victim (144), the dissection of Ballard's corpse (184), and the discovery of his many victims (186).

McCarthy, too, heavily relies on neologisms and archaic words to slow down the reader, another form of violence against language. "[V]irid moss" (14), "hornetnest" (14), and "windfelled poplar" (119) are just a few examples.

Additionally, there are moments where the text violates the conventions of language by suddenly shifting verb tense or perspective. Often these happen in conjunction with each other. The story shifts to the present tense to say, "There is a spring on the side of the mountain that runs from solid stone." (McCarthy 119). Later in the section, the narrator says, "In the frozen roadside weeds were coiled white ribbons of frost, *you'd* never figure how they came to be" (120). These sentences precede a scene in which violence is both explicit and implied. We then see Ballard wearing stolen shoes and selling scavenged watches, both implications of his past murders (121-24). Immediately after Ballard sells the watches, the buyer sells them to his friends for a higher price, a depiction that shows Ballard being ripped off, an act of economic violence (124).

Later in the text, when Ballard is nearly drowned, the language again shifts to the present tense and again deploys the eerie "you":

He could not swim, but how would you drown him? . . . Some halt in the way of things seems to work here. *See him*. You could say he's sustained by his fellow men, *like you*. Has peopled the shore with them calling to him. A race that gives suck to the maimed

and the crazed, that wants their wrong blood in its history and will have it. But they want this man's life. He has heard them in the night seeking him with lanterns and cries of execration. How then is he borne up? Or rather, why will not these waters take him? (147)

This passage commands the reader, it questions the reader, it likens the reader to Ballard, reminiscent of a line in the opening section describing Ballard as “[a] child of God much like yourself perhaps” (6). This violently goes against the conventions of the text and implores the reader to question his or her own complicity in the moral quandaries that abound. But the former passage is also loaded with violent content. Ballard is poised between death two ways, death from the water that seems unable to drown him and death from the men that hunt him in the night. He seems to have no place in either civilization or the natural world.

On the structural level, the text employs heteroglossia to destabilize the prose. Sections are given solely in the form of unattributed dialogue that the reader must infer is coming from an unnamed townspeople (10, 57, 77). There are also two sections from the perspective of the Sheriff (137, 151). These sections all deal with the struggle between civilization and nature and those outcasts who aren't fit for either.

This section of the paper has focused on the portrayal of violence to language and the effect it has of emphasizing some deeper act of violence, but it referred to this violent content only as necessary. The following section will step away from the violence at the level of language and examine the contents where the natural world is the target of a violent act.

B. Violence Against the Natural World

The natural world often comes under attack in the texts, or the texts give evidence of prior violence. These texts are far from environmentalist, as often the natural world inflicts violence upon itself.

In “The Bear,” and in *Go Down, Moses* in general, much has been made of the violence inflicted upon the natural world. But the criticism often focuses on the violence perpetrated by civilization. There is no doubt that this type of violence occurs. The most blatant form of violence, the violence that could be mistaken as the theme of *Go Down, Moses* when taken as a novel, is logging. Even in “The Bear,” where the focus has shifted much more to the ritual of hunting for four of the five sections, the text presents loaded adjectives when describing the woods as “unaxed” (Faulkner 183, 303). Were logging not a concern, this adjective would be superfluous, as all standing woods are by necessity unaxed. This adjective connotes a temporariness to the standing woods, implying violence in the future. By the time the reader

reaches section five, the axing has begun. The section begins with Ike going to the camp one last time before the lumber company starts to “cut the timber” (300). The last occurrence of the adjective “unaxed” takes place from Ike’s vantage in the “clattering” locomotive as it passes between “twin walls of unaxed wilderness as of old” (303). This reiterates the temporariness of the adjective, as the unaxed wilderness is standing directly adjacent to the wilderness that has been already axed in order to lay rail for the train. We know that this is just the beginning as the new planing mill is only half completed and Ike sees “miles of steel rails” ready to be laid (302). And the fact that he must ride a train to reach the wilderness implies that civilization has already stretched its bounds into the natural world.

The train itself is depicted as a violent entity, with its “shriek[s]” and “churning” and “clashing” and “deep slow clapping bites of power” (Faulkner 303). In fact, the text relates an anecdote of this violent locomotive that had been “harmless once” that now scares a bear up into a tree (303). The train’s attempt to slow is described as the “brakeman throw[ing] chunks of ballast” at the bear (303). In order to safely allow the bear down from the tree, the old hunting group must take action: Boon and Ash sit under the tree to keep hunters away and de Spain must stop the running of the train before bringing Compson, Ewell, and Cass out to watch it come down after the thirty-six hours it had spent treed (304). This disruption of the natural world is an act of violence perpetrated by civilization, and the processes of civilization must temporarily stop before the natural order can resume.

For all of the detail relayed in celebration of the ritual of the hunt, the text does not shy away from the violence inherent to it. Old Ben has a “trap-ruined foot” and when he is finally slain by Boon’s intimate knifing, fifty-two old bullets are found in the corpse (Faulkner 182-83, 234). Other creatures of the natural world are victims of the hunt as well: mostly small game (194), and the occasional buck (198).

Acts of violence against the natural world often take on the more figurative meaning of the term. The text constantly shows acts by men to impose civilization onto the natural world. The concept of ownership is the most blatant, as shown through the conveyances of Native Americans (Faulkner 181) and most notably, de Spain (381). Even the land that Ike renounces can only exist as an entity to be renounced through the prior assertion of possession. That the camp even exists is an act of dominion (185), as are the use of compass, watch, and rifle (197-98). The domestication of dogs, mules, and horses are also attempts to assert the dominion of civilization over the natural world (183, 188-90, 207, 217-18, 220). These creatures occupy a middle space between the natural world and civilization. They reveal that the two are not

entirely independent entities, much as Evans argues,⁵ but are interrelated, yet adversarial forces. Domesticated animals could be seen as a type of society imposed over an entity from the natural world through breeding and taming. The text supports this ambivalence by alternately referring to the dogs as “brute beasts” (Faulkner 190) and “almost human” (187). Even the act of naming creatures who had not been tamed -- Old Ben (183) and Lion (208) -- acts that accord these creatures a place in the order of the language of civilization through signification, and thus a place in civilization itself. Providing a burial for Lion and protecting him from scavengers is also an imposition of civilization on the natural order, which would allow Lion to decompose naturally or become carrion (236, 239).

Civilization, though, is not the only perpetrator of violence. The natural world inflicts violence upon itself. Ike, at one point, spot the bear across “down timber where a tornado had passed” (199). One day of the hunt takes place during “winter’s dying afternoon” (189), showing that time holds sway over all of the natural world. This is emphasized later as winter comes and is represented as “the year’s death, somber, impenetrable” (184). Ike consistently uses a “marred log, scored and gutted with claw marks” as a reference point (189, 192, 194), showing that the creatures of the woods inflict harm to the trees of the natural world. Old Ben himself takes the life of a doe and a fawn, though the hunters mistakenly attribute this to a panther (202). The natural world plays victim to violence throughout the story.

Child of God, too, portrays the natural world as the target of myriad violences. Though we do not have the same concerns of logging, we do see depictions of the hunt, in particular the boar hunt cited above (McCarthy 65-66). Here again, we see the domesticated animals (hounds) in pursuit of a boar.⁶ Again, they appear to occupy a liminal space between civilization and the natural world. Ballard seems to occupy a similar liminal space, as he is described as a “child of God” and “sustained by his fellow men” (147) on the one hand, he is also described as “a misplaced and loveless simian shape” (21). And in an eerie moment when Ballard is waiting and watching Greer, he issues a command to nature, which nature appears to obey: “He told the snow to fall faster and it did” (131). Ballard is neither of the natural world nor of the civilized world, yet he maintains trappings of each. He also exhibits behavior that is accepted by neither. His necrophilia (82-90, 98) is against the orders of both the natural world and civilization. The dumpkeeper, Reubel, also acts against the natural order by raping his daughters (28).

⁵ See note 1.

⁶ Ballard hunts as well. Part II begins with him returning with a brace of dead squirrels from a hunt (81).

In the natural world, things lie where they have died until they become a source of nutrition for other entities, be it through decomposition or scavenging. In this way, Ballard's removal of dead bodies to stow them beneath the earth in a cavern are acts of violence against the natural world (McCarthy 127). Civilization subverts the natural order in a similar, though somewhat less grotesque way, by reading religious rites before hanging Klansmen (158), by hunting for Ballard's victims to give them a proper burial (172-73), by shipping Ballard's corpse to a medical school for dissection as a cadaver before giving a simple religious service and interring him in a cemetery (184), and when the chasm opens as a man plows his field (another act of violence against nature), the law comes and defiles a corpse as they try to extricate it before they haul away seven bodies like "enormous hams" (186). It is fitting that these scenes all contain another type of violence, be it hanging, dissection, or defilement, the last a notable, chilling parallel to Ballard's own difficulties in elevating a corpse (89-90).

Smaller acts of violence also populate the novel: knocking down a hornets' nest (McCarthy 14), sweeping out fox and possum dung (14), quarried stones (26), litter in bushes (26), ruined vehicles (37), and the creation of paths (130). These moments implicate prior acts of violence against the natural world, though the natural world is often depicted as reclaiming them for its own.

As with "The Bear," the natural world also inflicts violence upon itself. In the same scene that shifts to present tense before Ballard sells his victims' watches, the text describes a windfelled poplar (119). Winter, again, is also the medium of great violence, as it destroys the mountainside (128), and when the spring comes, the thaw reveals the death that has taken place at winter's hand (130). The most notable point that arises in this analysis is the ever-presence of violence. Though man and civilization inflict a great deal of violence upon the natural world, the text reveals that the natural world is itself a violent entity, capable of creating death and destruction without the help of civilization. The second notable point is the reinforcement of the idea that the natural world and civilization do not exist as independent binary forces, but instead are interrelated, and there exists a liminal space in which domesticated animal, Sam Fathers, and Lester Ballard seem to exist.

The next section will explore the violence inflicted against civilization, and similar patterns will emerge.

C. Violence Against Civilization

The natural world gives as good as it gets. And civilization's violence is not contained to the natural world. Both texts portray civilization as the target of a great deal of violence, at the hand of the natural world and of itself.

Though the natural world is not typically accorded agency in "The Bear," it is nonetheless a source of a great deal of the violence inflicted upon civilization. As noted above, in the earliest passages of the text, it is revealed that the only hunters who are talked about are those with "the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive" (Faulkner 181). This immediately presents the natural world as a threat to the men of civilization. The threat is ongoing, in the form of the woods, which "loomed" and "towered" (183) in Ike's dreams before he had even stepped foot in them and which closed behind him immediately (185), indicating that escape is not a given. Threat is also present in the form of Old Ben, who also looms over Ike "like a thunderclap" (200) and who shreds Boon's left ear, leg, hand, and arm (229). Even a dead man, in the form of Sam Fathers, is not safe from the creatures of the natural world (241).

The domesticated animals of civilization are also targets of the natural world's violence. A mare becomes "frantic with terror" (201), a colt is murdered by Old Ben (202), a mule has lost an eye (189), numerous dogs are maimed and killed, even Lion (187-88, 191, 212, 225-26, 235).

Even the very structures of civilization are under threat. The cabin at the hunting camp is in the process of "being flattened by rain to a nameless and valueless rubble of dissolution in that roadless and even pathless waste of unfenced fallow and wilderness jungle" (Faulkner 263-64). Attempts to tame the land are depicted as "man's puny gnawing at the immemorial flank . . . like a solitary boat tossed up and down in the ocean" (184-85). Both the depiction and the simile present nature as an indomitable force of reclamation.

Civilization, too, acts against itself. This is most notable in the whole of Section Four, in which Ike renounces the trappings of civilization in the form of patrilineal descent and property ownership (Faulkner 241-300). The shelf of ledgers in this section preserve in writing numerous acts of violence by one member of civilization against another—enslavement, rape, incest (247-57). Ike also creates discontinuities within the civilized community by refusing to submit to his wife (296-300). De Spain's sale of the property is not only a violence against nature but also a violence against the civilization-induced ritual of the hunt (301). Compson and Ewell attempt to use incorporation (a trapping of civilization) in order to create a hierarchy with regards to hunting privileges (300). This is an act of violence against other men by way of restriction. Other civilization-borne entities do the same: "speculators in human misery, manipulators of money

and politics and land, who follow catastrophe” (276). That this attempt fails is a reciprocal act of violence. The violence takes physical form with Boon’s attempt to shoot a “negro” (217-18), the lynchings by the Klansmen (276), and men shot dead in polling booths (277).

Child of God is a study in violence targeted toward the members and trappings of civilization. Ballard alone is a behemoth of destruction. The natural world, however, also inflicts such violence. This happens on a massive scale with the advent of the enormous flooding of the city that sees water rising to the level where the Sheriff and other townsfolk can get around the city by way of boat (McCarthy 151-59). The Sheriff opines that the flood is penance for the history of civilization’s sins (155-56). The flooding stream also attacks Ballard, as its current sweeps him away, destroys most of his possessions, and sends a log hurtling at him (147). The cold of winter also threatens Ballard and his possessions. Two points in the story depict the escalation of frostbite on his feet (96, 150), and the cold even freezes the lever of his rifle so that he cannot salvage it for a period of time, causing him to chuck it in the fire before quickly pulling it out (149). The cold reduces Ballard to his most atavistic form, leaving him “gibbering, a sound not quite crying that echoed from the walls of the grotto like the mutterings of a band of sympathetic apes.” (150). The caverns swallow the group of hunters that had forced Ballard to lead them to the corpses and threatens to keep them due to their disorientation (177).

When the natural world is not threatening the lives of the men of civilization, it is still providing an obstacle. This works most notably to underscore Ballard’s isolation from civilization, as any time he wishes to make contact with society, or society with him, it requires a somewhat arduous journey. The first time the Sheriff comes to apprehend Ballard, he must “ford the sheer wall of dried briars and weeds at the edge of the road” (McCarthy 48). Ballard must make an arduous trek through the snow when he seeks to buy accessories for his first corpse/girlfriend (91, 94), which leaves him frostbitten. When he sets out to watch Greer, he must wander over a mountain and through snow (104). When he goes back to Greer’s place to steal some chickens and eggs, it takes him all morning to make the journey (128). Even in reaching the scene of one of Ballard’s crimes, the Sheriff must drive up a “deeply mired road fishtailing slightly and unreeling long slabs of wet mud from under the tires” (137). The hunters that follow Ballard in an attempt to recover the victims must go “[d]own narrow corridors, across stone rooms where fragile spire stood everywhere” and they must go “on hands and knees between shifted bedding planes and up a narrow gorge” (175). And when Ballard emerges from the cavern, it takes him all night to get back to the hospital (182).

Often, the natural world inflicts violence to civilization by way of reclamation: “A few shards of planking grown with a virid moss and lying collapsed in a shallow hole where weeds sprouted in outsized mutations” (14); Quarried blocks of stone are “weathered gray and grown

with deep green moss” (26); and monoliths are “toppled . . . among the trees and vines” (26); and the “ruins of an old truck lay rusting in the honeysuckle” (37).

Of course, the most shocking violence in *Child of God* is often perpetrated by a member of civilization, usually Ballard,⁷ upon another member of civilization. Ballard’s murders and necrophilia pervade the novel (82-87, 112-13, 127, 142-43). He also attempts to kill Greer, shooting him, and Greer survives and is able to blow Ballard’s arm clean off (163-64). Ballard becomes the victim of civilization when he is caged, contracts pneumonia, dies after a hospital treats him improperly, and is sent for dismemberment (183-84).

Civilization, again, often in the form of Ballard, does not inflict violence only upon the bodies of men, but also upon the civil order. Ballard, like Ike McCaslin, refuses to recognize the convention of property rights (8), though he will participate in economic transactions when it behooves him, yet even these transactions often evince a sort of violence, be they getting ripped off by other men (124) or not paying his debts (117-18). Even Ballard’s ancestors do violence to social convention by receiving a military pension despite not serving, though his ancestor is hanged elsewhere for other deviant behavior (77). And it is worth noting that the operation of law takes other lives as well by hanging the “White Caps” (158). The operation of law also shuts down a bootlegger’s operation, doing economic violence to him (108).

This analysis reiterates the points from the previous section: violence is everywhere in these texts, and it does not discriminate between victims.

IV. Conclusion

These texts do not present a binary opposition between the natural world and civilization, in which one is privileged. As Mathews would say, the insight comes from the play between them, the difference. However, Foucault’s dogged examination of discontinuity and rupture allow this paper to go beyond the “play” between the natural world and civilization, but to examine the discontinuities, the violences, that the natural world inflicts upon itself and the same masochism demonstrated by society. These texts, like history, can be viewed as simply a series of events in which the struggle for dominance is played out, as if on a stage. The question shifts from whether the writer intends the natural world to achieve the status of nature to

⁷ It is problematic to categorize Ballard as a part of civilization, given that he clearly resides in the margins of society and, as this paper posits, occupies a liminal space between civilization and the natural world. Nonetheless, with that caveat, he can be categorized as such as he participates in a number of social conventions: he uses language, he submits to the legal system and the healthcare system, and he engages in several economic transactions.

whether such a thing as nature can even exist. This paper would reply that if something like nature does exist in these texts, then it must be something like violence.

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