

STEWARDSHIP, PRIVATE PROPERTY, AND METABOLIC RIFT: HOW SYSTEMIC
STRUCTURE IN YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY ENSURES ISAAC
MCCASLIN'S FAILURE IN *GO DOWN, MOSES*

by

Jack Taylor Wells

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ABSTRACT

This essay re-interprets William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* through a Marxist lens of metabolic rift where Isaac (Ike) McCaslin's repudiation of his inheritance is not seen as a personal failure, but an inevitable failure of the system of capitalism. John Bellamy Foster reads Marx through an ecocritical lens and expands upon Marx's ideas of social metabolism, creating the theory of metabolic rift, which posits that capitalism creates an irreparable rift between town and country. Ike is surrounded by alienated individuals in Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County; however, under the mentorship of Sam Fathers, he develops an ethically independent individualism which he transfers onto his relationship with nature. When Ike's experiences in the wilderness are read as labor, in a Marxist sense, the result is that his labor is profoundly unalienated. It is through Ike's decision not to dominate the wilderness and to, at times, act as a steward that sets him apart from his capitalist peers. This ethical mindset of Ike's, however, is not sufficient to be transformative, and Ike is forced to confront history. Ike can repudiate his inheritance of the McCaslin plantation, but that alone doesn't change the material conditions of society. By examining Ike through this lens of metabolic rift, we can see that his profoundly unalienated relationship with nature and his ethically independent individualism are only possible within the system that he ultimately rejects, revealing Faulkner's tragic insight.

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INTRODUCTION

PRIVATE PROPERTY AND INDIVIDUALISM

For Karl Marx, private property is fundamentally connected to individualism. However, the individualism that is created under capitalism is false. This falsified individualism under capitalism, as Marx described it, is the direct result of the estrangement of labor, and the estrangement of labor is a result, and also a cause, of private property. Marx examined four types of alienation of the worker under capitalism in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, the first being alienation from the product. The workers create products that do not belong to them, and thus become alienated from them: “the object which labor produces – labor’s product – confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object which has become material: it is the objectification of labor... The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object... It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 29). The objectification of labor is the process whereby humans, through their efforts, turn nature into objects, and because the products they produce do not belong to them, the worker can only see it as something alien. The worker sees the products they create taken from them (by the capitalists), and because these products embody the worker’s time and energy, by losing the product, the worker is losing part of themselves. The product of labor turns into something independent from the worker, and the more the worker produces, the more alienated they become. If the product of labor is something alien to the worker, the process of labor, or the process of creating products, must be the process of alienation.

The process of labor is the thing that actively alienates the worker from the product. It is described by Marx as “the activity of alienation” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 30). The worker has no control over their labor, and the process is essentially forced upon them: “it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it” (30). The workers' labor is there to meet the needs of the external capitalists, and therefore, the worker is never fulfilled through their labor, as it is only there to meet the needs of others. The capitalists decide what is produced, where it is produced and how it is produced, key decisions that are not made by the worker. The worker becomes a pawn for the capitalists, performing repetitive tasks for the needs of others, leaving the worker to become dehumanized, leading to a loss of self.

The worker loses their sense of self through the process and the product of their labor under capitalism. Marx described humans as species-being, meaning that they have a unique creative and social potential, with the ability to create beauty that goes beyond their immediate needs; and unlike animals, humans are able to consciously recognize life and life activity as separate things. “Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young... whilst man produces universally” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 32). A species-being human is not an inherently bad thing in Marx's eyes, but under capitalism, that labor becomes distorted and the process of alienation begins: “estranged labor makes man's species-life a means to his physical existence” (32). This estranged labor under capitalism breaks off humans from their species-being and forces them to an animal-like state of survival. Rather than being able to form genuine human connections, they fail to see others as fellow species-beings, leading to an alienation of the self and others.

Humans not only fail to recognize themselves as species-being, but also fail to recognize others as species-being as a result of estranged labor under capitalism. “An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labor, from his life activity, from his species-being, is the estrangement of man from man” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 32). When humans are unable to see others as fellow species-beings and everything is reduced to a means of survival, they become alienated from each other.

So how does the alienation of the worker relate to the alienation of the non-worker, Isaac (Ike) McCaslin, in *Go Down, Moses*? To answer this, Ike must first be established as a worker or a non-worker. In a strictly Marxist sense, Ike is a non-worker at first. As part of the land owning aristocratic and bourgeois society, he does not need to perform labor out of necessity like his companion Sam Fathers does. The moment when Ike refuses his inheritance (the McCaslin plantation) upon his twenty-first birthday in “The Bear,” his older cousin McCaslin (Cass) Edmonds responds: “‘Relinquish,’ McCaslin said. ‘Relinquish. You, the direct male descendent of him who saw the opportunity and took it...Not only the male descendent but the only and last descendent in the male line’” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 242-243). Before relinquishing his inheritance, Ike is the last descendent of his landowning grandfather, Carothers McCaslin, undoubtedly putting him in the aristocratic bourgeois society of Yoknapatawpha County. The very fact that Ike has the choice to relinquish his inheritance again puts him well within the structural limits of the non-worker. In a capitalist society, the worker does not have the power to refuse property because of capitalism's estrangement of labor. The worker has no ownership of private property, and therefore cannot refuse it.

Ike is a worker in practice, but not structurally. The work that he performs is voluntary, not out of necessity. Ike hunts the land with the hunting party, but he does not have to. The

hunting party consists of varying social classes, most of which do not need to hunt for food; they will still eat whether or not they were the ones who shot the deer. So Ike displays qualities of a worker, yet he is structurally a non-worker.

Let us compare the worker and the non-worker in the novel, Ike being the non-worker, and Sam Fathers being the worker. Ike does not need to sell his labor to survive. His social status means he can hunt or not hunt, but it is not at the cost of his livelihood. Sam Fathers, however, is the son of Chickasaw chief Ikkemotubbe and a quadroon slave woman, putting him within the lower working class: "White man's work, when Sam did work. Because he did nothing else: farmed no allotted acres of his own, as the other ex-slaves of old Carothers McCaslin did, performed no field-work for daily wages as the younger and newer negroes did—and the boy never knew just how that had been settled between Sam and old Carothers" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 161). Sam is different from the ex-slaves in the fact that he does white man's work (carpentry and blacksmithing), but it is still work. Sam's livelihood on the McCaslin plantation depends on his work. He cannot live and eat freely without working, like Ike can. Sam lives on land which he will never own. Ike, however, lives on land which he will have the choice of owning. Ike ends up repudiating this land, but that ability to choose sets him apart from Sam. Faulkner never gives any specific suggestion that Sam Fathers is unable to own private property, but the social class which Sam is a part of, is almost universally unable to own private property.

Ike is thus in a unique place within society. Displaying qualities of both, he is neither a worker nor a non-worker. However, Ike's ability to refuse his inheritance and his actual refusal of it are two different things. Once he actually relinquishes his inheritance and ultimately refuses capitalism, he is no longer a capitalist. So Ike can no longer be a non-worker, because he is no longer a capitalist, and he cannot be a worker because he had the ability to refuse land in the first

place. How, then, should we characterize Ike's position in society? Ike represents Faulkner's critique of southern property inheritance and can be characterized as an ascetic heir.

Let us now examine Major de Spain's place within society. Undoubtedly a non-worker, Major de Spain, like General Compson, represents the shift from the old aristocracy of the south to the new capitalist order. In "Hunting Stories & Stories Told about Hunting: What Isaac McCaslin Thinks He Learns in The Big Woods," Harry Thomas writes, "Faulkner's hunters go to the big woods to perform, maintain, and test themselves against [an] aristocratic code of Southern sportsmanship" (Thomas, 564). The hunters go into the woods to test themselves, or defend their social status as white landowners. Thomas represents the southern code as aristocratic. And it is true that Major de Spain and General Compson are part of the aristocracy, they also both represent the barrier between the old aristocratic order and the new capitalist order of the south.

We can tell that the old aristocratic order is being phased out by capitalism, because Major de Spain uses his land for profit. The aristocracy valued wealth and power, and in the American South, this was achieved through land ownership and inheritance. Enrico Del Lago outlines the old aristocracies of the American south in "Southern elites: a comparative study of the landed aristocracies of the American South and the Italian South, 1815-1860:" "land was the basis of power, in both America and Europe. The first settlers in the Chesapeake were well aware of the importance of landowning" (Del Lago, 44). For aristocracies to arise, land ownership was necessary, but with the rise of capitalism, the drive for profit overtook those aristocratic values. Major de Spain's land was valued for so long by the hunting party for their annual hunting trips, until he sold its timber rights for profit: "And the next spring they heard (not from Major de Spain) that he had sold the timber-rights to a Memphis lumber company" (Faulkner, *Go Down*,

Moses, 301). Under capitalism, land ownership is not as important as profit. Capitalism does not force Major de Spain to forget his ideals of land ownership, but it causes him to engage in the capitalist mode of production.

Major de Spain's capitalist activity can be defined as the appropriation of nature. Marx outlined the relationship between property and the appropriation of nature in *Grundrisse*: "All production is appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society" (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 87). For capitalist production to happen, something must be taken from nature, and it is the current form of society (capitalism) that creates the possibility of this appropriation. It is true that private property is a fundamental and extremely important aspect of capitalism, but it only serves as a means to generate profit.

Now, private property differs from personal property in an important sense. Marx discusses private property in *The Communist Manifesto*: "Modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products" (Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 48). Private property, Marx argued, is the final expression of capitalism. Marx went on, "Do you mean the property of the petty artisan, and of the small peasant, a form of property that preceded the bourgeois?... Or do you mean modern bourgeois private property?...It creates capital" (48). Modern bourgeois private property, Marx argued, differs from the small property of the peasant through the exploitation of wage labor.

Property in land is what Marx mostly concerns himself with. In *Capital*, volume three, Marx analyzes private ownership of land: "Yet private ownership of land, and thus the expropriation from the land of the direct producers – private ownership for some, involving non-ownership of the land for others – is the basis of the capitalist mode of production" (Marx and Engels, *Capital* Volume 3, 948). The capitalist mode of production –the thing that creates

estranged labor and therefore alienation— is a direct result of large landed property. For capitalism to exist, land ownership and the expropriation of that land must already exist. It is from the exploitation of small scale property that large landed property arises. Marx argued that small scale property acts as a hindrance to the development of capitalism. “Here, in the case of small-scale agriculture, the price of land, as a form and result of private property in land, appears as a barrier to production itself” (948). Capitalism does not favor small scale property and small scale agriculture. When the bourgeois concentrates small scale property into large landed property, capitalist production is born. So capitalism depends on private land ownership, hence why private property is inherently linked to alienation.

Even the non-worker is still alienated under capitalism, only it is not in the same way that the worker is. “In general we should observe that in those cases where worker and capitalist equally suffer, the worker suffers in his very existence, the capitalist in the profit on his dead mammon” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 21). The worker suffers directly, while the capitalist suffers through their entire existence being reduced to the accumulation of wealth. By using the term “dead mammon,” Marx highlighted that capital is dead labor, and dead labor is meaningless without active labor (workers) to give it value, making the capitalist’s life inherently tied to that of the worker. The capitalists are tied to this dead labor as it controls their life, yet they also control labor, as they are the ones who decide what is produced, where it’s produced, and when it’s produced. “The relationship of the worker to labor engenders the relationship to it of the capitalist... Private property is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of alienated labor” (80-81). The capitalist’s relationship to labor directly comes from the workers’ alienated relationship with labor. Through this relationship, the

capitalist becomes dependent on alien labor, forcing themselves into alienation in return. The capitalist may benefit from the system, but the system as a whole dehumanizes them.

The capitalist becomes dehumanized when they relate to everything and everyone through money and profit. Speaking about money, Marx wrote: “The distorting and confounding of all human and natural qualities, the fraternization of impossibilities – the divine power of money – lies in its character as men’s estranged, alienating and self-disposing species-nature. Money is the alienated ability of mankind” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 138). Under capitalism, everything is valued based on its price. Money turns everything upside down, intrinsic human values become something that can be bought. Capitalists spend money to appear different; Marx used the example of bravery: “He who can buy bravery is brave, though a coward” (140). Money lets capitalists buy what they lack – the fraternization of impossibilities.” This forces the capitalists to relate to one another through money and profit rather than basic human values.

So how is Ike alienated under capitalism? Ike is different from his capitalist peers in the ways that he is alienated. Ike’s alienation comes primarily from his moral beliefs. Private property is a fundamental concept of capitalism, and Ike rejects it. “I can’t 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 to them to bequeath me to repudiate” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 243). Ike’s rejection of the fundamental building block of capitalism (land ownership) sets him apart from society, it alienates him. Ike’s ethics are incomprehensible within capitalism, and they undermine everything that capitalism stands for. If Ike rejects that his grandfather ever had the ability to bequeath the land to his father, and then his father to him, then he rejects the laws of inheritance. Ike is morally articulate, but socially estranged.

Ike's profound social estrangement sets him outside of society. His moral beliefs alienate him from himself and from others. Essentially, Ike rejects the rule of law itself. The capitalist society in Yoknapatawpha County is built on private property laws, and remains so because of capitalist laws protecting those rights. The individuals who first acquired the land through legal means, Carothers McCaslin being among them, asserted their positions in society and exercised their individualism. In his 1842 article, "Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood," Marx attributed the separation between social classes to private property. He argued that the poor were unjustly criminalized for collecting fallen wood on private property in Prussia. John Bellamy Foster examines this in *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*: "The state, by supporting such an irrational law, Marx argued, was turning the ordinary citizen, pursuing customary rights into a criminal, an 'enemy of wood.' The poor were thus denied any relation to nature—even for their survival—unmediated by the institutions of private property" (Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and nature*, 67). This denial of the poor to collect dead wood to survive both creates rifts in the natural social metabolism and re-affirms existing class systems. These property laws served the land-owning class and re-established the poor as poor. In this analysis, the law transformed nature into private property, as a result of which, when enforced by officers of the law, poor people were criminalized for collecting dead wood. The unmediated institutions of private property as Foster describes then illuminate how the law transforms nature into property in *Go Down, Moses*.

Marx concluded that if collecting dead wood on private property is considered theft of private property, then all private property would also be considered theft: "If every violation of property without distinction, without a more exact definition, is termed theft, will not all private property be theft? By my private ownership do I not exclude every other person from this

ownership?” (Marx, “Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood”). Ike follows a Marxist viewpoint in the way that he believes land ownership to be a form of theft.

The McCaslin plantation was once just wilderness, until humans transformed it into the plantation that it is in the novel. Ike’s older cousin McCaslin (Cass) Edmonds tells him about when their grandfather purchased the land from old Ikkemotubbe, “... out of the old grant, the first patent, when it was a wilderness of wild beasts and wilder men, and cleared it, translated it into something to bequeath to his children” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 243), as if he is still proud of what Carothers did. Cass, unlike Ike, is still set in his capitalist mindset and still obeys the laws of man that transform nature into property. It was only through the law that Carothers McCaslin was able to legally claim the land as his through a deed. Much like the forest property laws in 1840s Prussia, institutional law in Yoknapatawpha County favors the upper class through laws of inheritance. Carothers had been the first individual to exercise his right to buy the land, and his heirs’ ownership of the land was then protected under the law, making them each individuals that perpetuated capitalist society.

Not only does Cass value the laws of inheritance, he believes that it is his god given right to own the land. In his argument with Ike, he turns to the bible, “Grandfather did own it. And not the first...Authority states, man was dispossessed of Eden. Nor yet the second and still not alone, on down through the tedious and shabby chronicle of his chosen...So let me say it: That nevertheless and notwithstanding old Carothers did own it” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 244). Cass believes that the right to own the land is divine law, and the descendants of the first man all have the right to own it. Ike explains to Cass his own interpretation of the Bible by saying that man never owned the land at all. “Bought nothing. Because He told in the Book how He created the earth, and then He made man...to be His overseer of the earth and to hold

suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in his name, not to hold for himself and his descendents inviolable title forever” (243). Ike believes that God made man to look over the earth, not to own it and pass it down to his descendents. Thadious M. Davis examines Cass’ Bible interpretation: “In Faulkner’s text there is no reconciliation of these divergent views of property and their appeals to various philosophical concepts of ownership” (Davis, 81). The divergence between Ike’s and Cass’ biblical interpretations suggests that Ike is moving away from a capitalist mindset of property ownership and inheritance, and he is no longer able to understand a viewpoint like his cousin’s.

Apart from Ike’s moral alienation from himself and others and society as a whole, his relationship to nature is profoundly unalienated. Ike’s profound unalienated relationship with nature is a direct result of his ethical individualism, which he receives from Sam Fathers. Let us look first at Karl Marx’s conception of individualism. Marx viewed individualism as a product of capitalist development. In *Grundrisse* (1939), Marx analyzed the individual throughout history. “The more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole... The human being is in the most literal sense a ζῷον πολιτικόν, [3] not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society” (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 18). The individual has become more pronounced throughout history, and it is a capitalist society that allows for individuals to emerge. The individual is not a natural thing, but an historical creation. Marx argued that the eighteenth century had produced the isolated individual. “In this society of free competition, the individual appears detached from the natural bonds... Production by an isolated individual outside society is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without

individuals living together and talking to each other” (17-18). The isolated individual is alienated from their own labor and therefore from a capitalist society as a whole.

John Bellamy Foster connects Marx’s views of individualism to nature by offering more insight into Marx’s own views of the alienation of humans from nature: “this estrangement of the worker from (1) the object of his/her labor, (2) the labor process, (3) human species, and (4) each other was inseparable from the alienation of human beings from nature, from both their own internal nature and external nature” (Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and nature*, 72). In a growing capitalist society, the isolated individual is already alienated from their labor, and therefore alienated from nature, since Marx viewed humans and nature as intrinsically connected. This capitalist alienation from nature through individualism further emphasizes how individualism plays a key role in the emergence of metabolic rifts. This is the paradox of Ike McCaslin: his ability to notice and understand the metabolic rifts that are present in Yoknapatawpha County and his attempt to use his individualism to reject the capitalist norms of increasing one’s own profit and to not play a part in the destruction of the environment, at times even attempting to reverse the metabolic rifts that are already in place. However, his individualism is a product of the very system that he rejects, meaning that in a significant sense, his entire enterprise is doomed before it even begins.

Marx believed that individualism perpetuated a capitalist society, and thereby bringing disconnection into humans’ relationship with nature. Individualism in the novel is displayed in various forms. There is the unrestrained individualism of the capitalists, the spiritual individualism of Sam Fathers, and the idealistic individualism of Ike. The capitalists of Yoknapatawpha County display a sense of individualism that is not true. In chapter 3 of *The German Ideology*, Marx examines individualism thus:

When the narrowminded bourgeois says to the Communists: by abolishing property, i.e., my existence as a capitalist, as a landed proprietor, as a factory owner, and your existence as workers, you abolished my individuality and your own; by making it impossible for me to exploit you, the workers, to rake in my profit, interest or rent, you make it impossible for me to exist as an individual.

When, therefore, the bourgeois tells the Communists: by abolishing my existence as the bourgeois, you abolish my existence as an individual ; when thus he identifies himself as a bourgeois with himself as an individual, one must, at least, recognize his frankness and shamelessness. For the bourgeois it is actually the case, he believes himself to be an individual only in so far as he is a bourgeois.

But when the theoreticians of the bourgeoisie come forward and give a general expression to this assertion, when they equate the bourgeois's property with individuality in theory as well and want to give a logical justification for this equation, then this nonsense begins to become solemn and holy (Marx, *The German Ideology*, 246).

The capitalist, by the ownership of their property, believes themselves to be an individual. Their conception of their individuality is ideologically linked to property and social classes. Because of their class position they believe their individual right –to exploit labor– is their own individual self. However, it is their role within capitalism, a role which they believe themselves to be in control of, that forces them into making the decisions of exploiting labor and appropriating nature. What the capitalist believes is their own choice is, in fact, socially determined. This is what Marx described as alienated individualism.

Major de Spain, for example, has wealth that is built on the ownership of land.

Although the exact origin of his wealth is never described, Faulkner suggests that his wealth is tied to the troubled history of the south: "Major de Spain and his fragment of that wilderness which was bigger and older than any recorded deed" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 241). Major de Spain's wealth is old, and likely came from slave labor, but regardless of where it came from, his perceived individualism that is tied to his property is false. Major de Spain, as an individual, has the right to hunt his land and, as we have seen, sell the timber rights on his land. Both of these activities are a form of exploitation. When hunting the land, the hunting party proves their dominance over nature. Nobuyo Unagami examines the hunting party's authority in "The Significance of Hunting: 'The Bear' and 'Delta Autumn:'" "It is difficult to find practical necessity in a hunting game, and so men pursue it only to bond with one another and confirm their absolute authority" (Unagami, 2). Unagami suggests that the hunters hunt solely to practice their authority, and this is true, they do not hunt out of necessity, but in a Marxist sense, they do not have a choice in the matter. Under capitalism, the capitalist must appropriate nature or they cease to be a capitalist. This is where their falsified idea of individualism is revealed.

The hunting parties' actions at the Big Bottom show not only their appropriation of nature, but also their unrestrained alienated individualism. The hunting party in the novel consists of varying social perspectives; there is Major de Spain, a white landowner, Sam Fathers, a mixed race elder, Boon Hogganbeck, a poor white man, Tennessees' Jim, a poor black man, General Compson, an experienced hunter and patriarch of the Compson family, Walter Ewell, an experienced hunter, Cass Edmonds, Ike's older cousin, and Ike, a young idealist. Major de Spain, being a landowner, is a constant reminder that capitalism extends even into the wilderness. Sam Fathers and Tennessee's Jim represent the class of people who have been economically oppressed

due to the south's legacy of slavery. Robert Myers discusses the essential feature of the hunting party, writing “*Go Down, Moses* powerfully depicts the environmental consequences of unrestrained individualism” (Myers, 2006). The hunting party is led by Major de Spain and General Compson, who use their individualism to display their capitalist ideals. “The proven hunters...scorned such other than shooting the wild gobblers with pistols for wagers to test their marksmanship” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 194). The code that the hunting party follows is a loosely followed set of rules because these “proven hunters” own the land and live in a capitalist society, allowing their unrestrained individualism to shine. These men do not care how their actions negatively impact the environment, because institutional law in their capitalist society sanctions this sort of behavior. This individualism, however, is only perceived as true because it relies on and stems from the capitalist system.

The alienated individualism of the capitalists in Yoknapatawpha County forces them to depend on others to maintain their so-called individualism. The landowners like Major de Spain and Cass view themselves as independent within the system, when in reality that independence only comes at the exploitation of others' labor. “Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 342). As I examined earlier, capital only exists when there is active labor to give it meaning. Marx's metaphor of capital being a vampire from *Capital*, volume 1 is reproduced through Cass' exploitation of living capital that, in turn, creates their false sense of individualism.

Without living capital to run the plantation, Cass' identity and authority, and therefore his sense of individualism, would not exist. In part 4 of “The Bear,” when Ike and Cass argue over Ike's ultimate repudiation of the McCaslin plantation, it becomes apparent that Cass'

identity only exists through his ownership of property. Cass' identity as the independent authority on the McCaslin plantation is created from the living capital of the workers who farm the plantation: "the ledgers in which McCaslin recorded the slow outward trickle of food and supplies and equipment which returned each fall as made and ginned and sold" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 242). When Cass records labor production in the ledgers he is translating labor into units and value, which is what Marx described as abstracted labor. For Cass, it is not about the labor itself, but the profit of that labor. Marx described abstracted labor in *Capital*, Volume 1: "On the one hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labourpower, in the physiological sense, and it is in this quality of being equal, or abstract, human labour that it forms the value of commodities" (Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 137). Capitalism reduces distinct labor into a generalized homogenous quantity. By Cass keeping records of abstract labor, he is producing as well as reproducing this abstract labor. Cass is not creating new value by keeping records, but he is managing this value and legitimizing his ownership. If the workers were to cease to exist, then Cass' authority would also cease to exist, so the entirety of his identity comes from the exploitation of labor. Cass appears as responsible manager of the plantation, but his power depends on records that preserve the labor that he does not perform; he is what Marx described as personified capital.

Marx analyzed the capitalist in *Capital*, Volume 1: "The capitalist only functions as *personified* capital, capital as a person, just as the worker is no more than *labour* personified" (Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 989). Under capitalism, the capitalist is not a free individual, but rather another part of the system. The capitalist must be constantly investing, creating surplus value, and competing with other capitalists, and if they fail to continue doing these things, then they cease to be a capitalist. Both the worker and the non-worker have roles under capitalism,

and these roles are dictated by societal and economic laws. Just as the workers' role is to sell their labor power, the capitalist's role is to exploit that labor power. To say that the individual is free under capitalism would be equal to saying that the individual is not alienated under capitalism. Cass' entire identity is inseparable from his role as a capitalist. Just like Cass, Major de Spain's identity as a free individual only exists because of his role as a capitalist.

Major de Spain's false individualism also relies on living capital. The hunting camp, owned by Major de Spain, yet maintained by living capital, serves as the prominent way for him (and the rest of the hunting party) to express their individualism. When Sam Fathers says to Cass and Major de Spain that he wants to go and live at the hunting camp, it demonstrates how the individualism of the capitalists exists only because of the labor of others: "I want to go," he said. "I want to go to the Big Bottom to live... I could take care of it for you all while you aint there. I will build me a little house in the woods, if you rather I didn't stay in the big one'" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 164). Sam is living capital. It is Sam Fathers who maintains the camp, keeps it clean and upkept for the hunting party when they arrive. However, it also becomes his home. Sam Fathers' home and his livelihood depend on the labor he produces to keep up the camp, and it is this place that the capitalists retreat to to assert their authority and dominance.

Sam's spiritual individualism is not false in the same sense that the capitalist's individualism is false, but it gives him no power within the capitalist system similar to that of the capitalist. At first, Sam's individualism appears as true. Marx gave a detailed account of what true individualism would look like in *Grundrisse* when he describes "The free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labour society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free"

(Marx, *Grundrisse*, 706). Marx posited that true freedom comes from time, however, when capitalism uses labor-saving technology to increase labor production, the labor becomes unnecessary and free time is rare. With the reduction of necessary labor, true individualism can be found within a society. For Marx, the freedom from necessary labor would look like one's basic needs being met by society as a whole, not by one being compelled to work to survive. So, Marx put forward the idea that labor-saving technologies should be used to reduce necessary labor for everyone, and not to increase surplus labor that only serves the capitalists.

Sam does not have freedom from necessary labor, therefore his individualism is not true. Much of Sam's time and energy is spent teaching Ike; however, he does not do this for personal development alone. "I done taught you all there is of this settled country, 'Sam said. 'You can hunt it good as I can now. You are ready for the Big Bottom now, for bear and deer'" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 165). Sam's teachings are there to ensure Ike's survival when he gets to the Big Bottom. Sam's duty is to guide and teach Ike the rules of the hunt, and because all of his time and energy is devoted to teaching Ike, he does not have the time to pursue true individual freedom. His individualism is bound by the social hierarchy.

It is apparent that Sam holds a deep respect for nature and values his long passed down knowledge of the woods. "Sam Fathers marked his [Ike's] face with the hot blood which he had spilled and he ceased to be a child and became a hunter and a man...Sam had marked him forever one with the wilderness" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 169). Sam teaches Ike that interacting with nature is more than just a recreational activity, it comes with an ethical responsibility. Unlike Major de Spain, or General Compson, Sam has a deep respect for nature. This is where his rich individuality might appear as true, and Sam's individualism is rich insofar as it exists outside of the system of capitalism. Sam's individualism is something that belongs to

him, and is independent from the social system. But Marx asserted that the individual is a social being that can only individuate itself in the midst of society, meaning that for individualism to be true, it must be backed up by society. Thus, existing largely outside of the social system in which he resides, Sam's individualism does not have the support of society and is therefore not true.

Sam's rich individualism brings him an unalienated relationship with nature, and through his teachings he passes this on to Ike. However, for all their similarities, their unalienated relationships are very different. The source of Ike's unalienated relationship with nature is chosen withdrawal. It is Ike's choice to disconnect from society and connect with nature, whereas Sam's connection is a lived, practical connection, predicated upon necessity.

Ike's individualism also appears as something true, but it cannot be in a Marxist sense. During his rejection of his inheritance he describes the land as cursed: "Dont you see? 'he cried. 'Dont you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed'" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 265). Ike's belief may be morally and ethically correct, but it is not socially supported, it is isolated. This does demonstrate, however, his ethically independent individualism. This belief of Ike's is rooted in his own consciousness, but his consciousness almost explicitly develops because of Sam Fathers. To make the claim that Sam teaches Ike ethically independent individualism so Ike can later dismantle the capitalist system would be false, because Sam himself has no political agenda. But it is true that Ike's ethically independent individualism gives him this possibility, which is why it initially appears as something that can transcend capitalism.

So, why then does Sam choose Ike as the last person that will inherit his knowledge? For one, it is Sam's duty to teach Ike the wilderness, he is still bound by the necessary labor of the capitalist system. But it is also because Sam recognizes Ike's unique ability to internalize and hold true to the teachings. Ike is not the only one who Sam taught the wilderness to, Cass was a

student of Sam at one point, too. However, Sam's teachings did not translate for Cass in the same way that they did for Ike. Just as he did Ike, Sam took Cass out to see the grandfather buck:

"Steady. I know you did. So did I. Sam took me in there once after I killed my first deer"

(Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 178). Cass had every possibility of developing an ethical independent individualism. However, he did not follow through. Sam acts as just the messenger, he can show Cass and Ike the buck and teach them how to hunt, but it is ultimately the individual who must develop this ethically independent individualism for themselves. This is what Sam recognized in Ike, this is why he chose Ike to be the final recipient of his spiritual individualism.

Ike is in a unique place in society, being neither a worker nor non-worker. He has freedom from necessary labor, but also the ethically independent individualism that he received from Sam's teachings. Ike's repudiation of his inheritance and his belief that the land is cursed is where he shows that he has the possibility to transcend capitalism; he rejects the fundamental aspects of capitalism: property, inheritance, power, and authority, and by denying this, Ike asserts that his individualism is not rooted in ownership. Ike's rich individualism gives him the moral and ethical principles to refuse capitalistic ideals, and he is not tied to labor, letting him sit in a unique place that gives him this possibility to transcend capitalism.

Ike's individualism is not only ethical and personal, but it also translates through his profoundly unalienated relationship with nature through his understanding of the irreparable social and ecological rift which further demonstrates and brings evidence to the claim that Ike has the possibility to transcend capitalism. His transcendence, however, is ultimately a failure, one that can be explained through the Marxist idea of metabolic rift.

21
CHAPTER ONE

THE IRREPARABLE RIFT

John Bellamy Foster's theory of metabolic rift –built on the ideas of Karl Marx– posits that capitalist activity leads to a disruption in the natural cycles between humans and nature, and this natural cycle, as Marx described it, consists of a kind of social metabolism: “the ‘metabolic interaction between man and the earth, ’that is, the ‘social metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life’” (Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, 156). First, it is worth examining Marx's materialist conception of history, along with his materialist conception of nature. Marx was indeed a materialist, but his materialist conception of history was not ontological, but more practical, as described by Foster: “Marx's materialist conception of history focused principally on practical materialism” (2). Ontological materialism asserts that matter is the fundamental substance of all nature, and the social completely emerges from matter. Practical materialism recognizes that matter shapes human consciousness, yet humans have the capability to change matter through their labor, making it a force for the transformation of social forms (Foster). In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels asserted that German philosophy was rooted in Hegelian ideas, with followers of Hegel building off of his ideas: “It has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings” (Marx, *The German Ideology*, 7). Marx, as well as Engels, applied Hegel's theory of dialectics to their own materialist conception, and this led to their conclusion that “to be truly meaningful, the dialectical conception of a totality in the process of becoming, associated with Hegel, had to be placed in a practical, materialist context, transcending Hegel's whole project of dialectically restoring

seventeenth-century metaphysics at the expense of Enlightenment materialism” (Foster, 5). Marx and Engels converted Hegel’s dialectics into their own materialist conception of reality, and dialectical materialism was born. Marx and Engels then applied dialectical materialism to history, developing historical materialism.

Marx and Engels outlined historical materialism, beginning with the living human individual: “Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature” (Marx, *The German Ideology*, 7). They argued that human history began with the living human individual’s physical organization, and their interaction with nature. A human’s physical organization, according to Marx and Engels, is the biological and physical makeup of a human that allows for them conscious and social production. “Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life” (7). Marx and Engels highlighted that humans’ distinction from animals comes in their ability to produce their means of subsistence, like creating tools and resources that they need to live, rather than acting instinctively as animals do. And in their own production, they in turn produce their own material life. Marx and Engels argued that production is what gives humans consciousness, not the other way around: “Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life” (14). The idea of production creating consciousness is a central concept of Marx’s historical materialism; it shows that humans have the capabilities to change nature and shape the world through their own production.

Marx's materialist conception of nature was not too different. Marx always believed that humans and nature were intrinsically connected. In his early writings on estranged labor, from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx first detailed this connection: "Man *lives* on nature—means that nature is his *body*. With which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature" (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 76). For Marx, humans did not just rely on nature to survive, they were a part of it. In *Go Down, Moses*, Ike demonstrates a deep connection to nature from the very beginning, epitomizing himself as an individual trapped within a capitalist society.

Marx's materialist conception of history merged with his materialist conception of nature, leading him to develop the term 'metabolism,' or *stoffwechsel*. The social metabolism is the way that humanity interacts with nature, and for Marx, this was through labor. "Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature" (Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 283). According to Marx, labor permits for the necessary appropriation of natural resources that are needed to satisfy human needs. In order for humans to exist and survive, they must have some level of interaction with nature, and are therefore intrinsically connected to it. This, however, is not yet capitalist labor, this is the type of labor that Ike demonstrates – or tried to adhere to – in his relationship with nature.

Ike's connection to nature, which came from Sam Fathers, evolves into a profoundly unalienated relationship, and Ike attempts to maintain this relationship through his labor. Marx States that labor in its general form, before capitalist labor emerges, is a conscious activity:

But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of the labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes [*verwirklicht*] his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it. Thus subordination is no mere momentary act. Apart from the exertion of the working organs, a purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the work (Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 284).

The labor of humans is a conscious activity with a desired outcome that was decided beforehand. Marx contrasts the human and the animal saying that the animal builds instinctively and unintelligibly compared to the human. Animals just do, while humans do with purpose and intent rather than instinctively. Ike demonstrates this sort of purposeful will in his relationship with nature through his constant awareness.

Ike's first voyage into the wilderness is where Faulkner signals the moment where he becomes a conscious moral subject. "It seemed to him that at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 185). Thus Ike reflects on his first voyage into the woods and remembers it as his awakening. That moment sets in motion Ike's entire consciousness. It is at the age of ten when Ike's will is bent in favor of the wilderness. Every choice he makes from that moment is purposeful and maintains his relationship with nature. Ike is not literally reborn, but he is changed, and Faulkner places that awakening in the wilderness because it exists outside of the system of capitalism. When Ike leaves society to enter the woods, he is entering a world governed by natural laws and respect. It is Ike's first experience of being

unalienated. However, that feeling of being unalienated is only possible because of what he learned from Sam Fathers.

Since his first day in the woods, Ike acts with purpose. It is in “The Old People” where Ike's love of the natural world begins at ten years old when Sam Fathers takes him on his first hunting trip. Ike longs to return to the woods after his first few experiences hunting, “having brought with him, even from his brief first sojourn, an unforgettable sense of the big woods – not a quality dangerous or particularly inimical, but profound, sentient, gigantic and brooding...” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 167). The wilderness immediately becomes a place bigger than Ike, it surrounds his thoughts as a mystical presence that he knows he will never understand, yet he makes it his purpose to try to, but not a conquering understanding, a submitting understanding. When Ike first encounters the mythical bear, Old Ben –the bear that the hunting party has been obsessed with for years– he makes his choice: “He only heard the drumming of the woodpecker stop short off, and he knew that the bear was looking at him. He never saw it. He did not know whether it was facing him from the cane or behind him. He did not move, holding his useless gun which he knew now he would never fire at it, now or ever” (192). In that moment, even though he does not lay his eyes on the bear, Ike chooses that he will never conquer the wilderness.

Marx continues in his definition of labor in its general form, which can still be either alienated or unalienated:

purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values. It is the appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of

that existence, or rather is it common to all forms of society in which human beings live (Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 290).

There is no doubt that Ike acts with purpose while he is in the wilderness. The simple fact that he returns to the Big Bottom every year demonstrates that he is committed to learning the big woods. Faulkner further demonstrates this Marxist idea of general labor through Ike's production of use-values. Ike's purposeful labor brings him knowledge of the wilderness, and for Marx, knowledge is undeniably a use-value. "The usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value... Use-values are only realized [*verwirklicht*] in use or in consumption" (126). Ike's knowledge that he gains in the wilderness from Sam Fathers is inherently useful to him: "He who satisfies his own need with the product of his own labour admittedly creates use-values, but not commodities" (131). Ike creates something useful to him, but he does not commodify it and does not capitalize on it. The process itself becomes something meaningful to Ike, which is the first step in Ike's labor being unalienated.

So far, Ike's experiences in the woods fit well with Marx's concept of general labor: they are purposeful and they create use-value for him. However, where Ike begins to stray from Marx's concept of labor is in the process that he separates the object of his labor and transforms nature. For Marx, the appropriation of nature through labor should materially transform it, but first, labor must separate the object of labor from its environment: "fish caught and separated from their natural element, namely water, timber felled in virgin forests, and ores extracted from their veins" (Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 284). Labor takes something out of nature before it physically transforms it. Taking ore from a vein or a fish out of water makes it accessible for use, but it is not yet transformed, it remains ore or a fish. The separation is the first step of appropriation, transforming that object: cooking a fish, or turning that ore into a usable product,

comes after. For Marx, the object of labor and its environment must be seen as completely different things. The examples that Marx uses: removing a fish from water or ore from a vein, are both activities involved with physically removing something, but Marx never limits labor to a physical change. "Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature" (Marx, 283). Marx simply states that any purposeful engagement with nature through labor changes it. Ike does not (or is unable to) view the object of his labor and its environment as separate things, rather he binds them together into one, single entity, and he does not transform it, but is transformed by it. "*So I will have to see him*, he thought, without dread or even hope. *I will have to look at him*" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 193). The very fact that Ike wants to look upon Old Ben, not to kill him, but just to see him demonstrates that he does not seek to transform the wilderness, but seeks to be transformed by it, and this transformation for Ike is in itself a use-value. So in a way, Ike skips the step of removing the object of his labor from its environment and transforming it, but is still able to be transformed by it and produce a use-value which is essentially the goal of labor according to Marx. So, Ike's transformation is considered the product of his labor.

The process of appropriation, as we have examined, involves a purposeful activity, the separation of the object of one's labor from its natural environment before an eventual transformation can happen, resulting in the production of a use-value. Within that process are the instruments of labor which humans use to appropriate it. "An instrument of labour is a thing, or a complex of things, which the worker interposes between himself and the object of his labour which serves as a conductor, directing his activity onto that object" (Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 285). The instrument of one's labor is what helps the worker mediate nature and complete the transformation of nature. The use of the instruments of labor or not, does not automatically make

labor alienated or unalienated. What's more important is who is using that instrument that determines if labor becomes alienated, but labor that does not require the use of instruments is what Marx described as the closest thing to unalienated labor: "Leaving out of consideration such readymade means of subsistence as fruits, in gathering which a man's bodily organs alone serve as the instruments of his labour, the object the worker directly takes possession of is not the object of his labour but its instrument" (285). When the worker uses an instrument, they are channeling their energy through that instrument into the object of their labor; however, when their body becomes that instrument, the worker directly has control.

The instruments of Ike's labor are his gun, his compass, and his watch. Each of these things helps him mediate his relationship with nature by acting as a way for him to interact with the object of his labor, namely, Old Ben. At the Big Bottom, Ike goes out each morning to find Old Ben and look upon him, but each time he is met with failure. "McCaslin and the others thought he was hunting squirrels. Until the third evening he believed that Sam Fathers thought so too. Each morning he would leave the camp right after breakfast...He found the tree beside the little bayou where he had stood that morning. Using the compass, he ranged from that point; he was teaching himself to be better than a fair woodsman without even knowing he was doing it" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 194). When Ike uses the instruments of his labor to forcefully connect with nature and dominate over it, he slips closer to alienated labor than unalienated labor.

The use of the instruments of one's labor are not the determining factor of labor being alienated or not, but without the instruments of labor, un-alienation becomes clearer. "The leaving of the gun was not enough. He 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, *Go Down, Moses*, 197). Ike’s gun is a way for him to gain immediate control over the wilderness, and by giving it up he is showing that his relationship with the woods is more than just conquest. The leaving of his compass and watch is when he fully submits to nature. “Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear: it was just there” (198). When he relinquishes all the physical instruments of his labor, he becomes the instrument of his labor, his ethical engagement becomes that instrument. By giving up his gun, compass and watch, Ike has not only changed his body, but also his attention and ethical engagement, allowing him to engage with nature directly instead of through the instruments of his labor. However, simply not using the instruments of his labor, does not mean that Ike’s labor is unalienated.

So how can Ike’s labor be unalienated if he just fits the bill for generalized labor? The answer is in the ways that he fits (or does not fit) into Marx’s four dimensions of estranged labor. Under capitalism, the worker is alienated from the product of their labor, Ike, however, is deeply connected to the product of his labor. If the product of Ike’s labor is his transformation (the knowledge he gains from looking upon Old Ben, and the skills he gains in the wilderness), which is also the production of a use-value, then Ike is never separated from the product of his labor as the producer. The product of Ike’s labor remains directly within his life activity because it is a lived experience. Ike has immediate unity with the product of his labor.

Moving on to the activity of his labor, or the process of his labor, Ike’s labor is a free conscious activity. Marx states that the process of alienated labor is: “not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour*” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844*, 74), meaning that alienated labor is not a free activity. However, it is Ike’s choice to hunt in the wilderness, it is not coerced because of wage labor, or forced upon him for his survival. And Ike is only able to be

freely conscious in the process of his labor because he is a species-being. For Marx, the species-being is: “the whole character of a species—its species character—is contained in the character of its life-activity; and free, conscious, activity is man’s species character” (76). Ike can be freely conscious in the process of his labor and his life-activity because he is connected to his species-being, and he is connected to his species-being because his labor is not reduced to the mere means of survival.

Now, the species-being is inherently a social being, so to be truly connected to one's species-being, it must be a socially supported thing. Where Ike's unalienated labor begins to differ from what Marx imagines unalienated labor to be is in his relation to others. Under capitalism, for Marx, the worker is unable to see themselves as a species-being, and therefore cannot see others as species beings. This forces the worker to relate to another worker through competition because each of them are forced to sell their labor to survive, and this prevents cooperative production. Ike, however, rejects capitalist logic, he is not in competition with his peers, but he is isolated. So Ike can have more connection to his species-being than his peers, but he will never be truly connected to it, and therefore will never be able to become unalienated from them as well. This is why Ike's unalienated labor in the wilderness can only be temporary, which I examine further in chapter two.

So the question is: is Ike's labor in the wilderness unalienated? Regardless of the fact that Ike will never be truly connected to his species-being and hence, unalienated from his peers, I would still make the claim that his labor in the wilderness is unalienated based on the ways that he does not fit into Marx's four types of estranged labor.

Having established that Ike's labor in the wilderness is indeed unalienated, I would also like to establish that Ike's profoundly unalienated relationship with nature (because of his

unalienated labor) is only possible through his ethically independent individualism. It is precisely this ethically independent individualism which sets him apart from his fellow hunters. From his peers, capitalist or not, Ike is separated. T.H. Adamowski examines Ike in the wilderness as “as a man who is defined as always being out of phase with other men. We find him there cut off from others, alone in the midst of the hunt, never quite part of the annual gathering in the Big Bottom” (Adamowski, 95). This is true, Ike is separated from his fellow hunters because he views nature as something to be understood, not conquered. When the hunting party encounters the grandfather buck –the same one that Sam took Cass to see– Boon instantly gears up to shoot it: “‘Get the dogs! ’Boon cried. ‘Get the dogs ’If he had a nub on his head, he had fourteen points! Laying right there by the road in that pawpaw thicket! If I’d a knowed he was there, I could have cut his throat with my pocket knife!’” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 170). Boon had seen the grandfather buck and immediately started yelling to the rest of the group to get the dogs so they could shoot it. The rest of the party followed suit. It is Sam that declares they do not need dogs. This reveals that the hunting party, apart from Sam and Ike, seeks to dominate nature. It is the hunting parties' use of their instruments of labor that alienates them: “In the labour process, therefore man’s activity, *via* the instruments of labour, effects an alteration in the object of labour which was intended from the outset” (Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 287). It is not necessarily the instrument, but who controls the instrument. The hunting party uses their instruments of labor (dogs, guns, horses) for domination. Not only is the hunting party alienated through the instruments of their labor, but they do not act with purpose. For the hunting party, their motivation comes from tradition and a social expectation. This reveals that the purpose of their labor is socially imposed rather than individually chosen.

Faulkner further demonstrates the hunting parties 'alienated labor and thus, their alienated connection to nature through Old Ben. "On the first morning that Lion led the pack after Old Ben, seven strangers appeared in the camp. They were swampers" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 210). The dog Lion has become a spectacle, and only exists in camp to take down Old Ben: "He's the dog that's going to stop Old Ben and hold him. We've already named him. His name is Lion" (208). In a way, through Lion becoming a spectacle, the hunting of Old Ben also becomes a spectacle. The hunting party does not revere nature like Ike does, they treat it as a prestige that they use their instruments to dominate over rather than understand. Within the party, individual desire is subordinated for the collective. The way that the hunting party interacts with the wilderness is a result of what Marx termed the irreparable rift.

In Volume Three of *Capital*, Karl Marx used the term "irreparable rift" to describe the impacts of capitalism on nature: "large landed property reduces the agricultural population to an ever decreasing minimum and confronts it with an ever growing industrial population crammed together in large towns; in this way it produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism" (Marx, *Capital* Volume 3, 949). Marx described how populations concentrated in cities, due to industrial growth, separated them from nature, and caused a lasting rupture in the natural metabolism. John Bellamy Foster takes up this rupture in *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and nature*. According to Foster, "an 'irreparable rift' emerged in this metabolism as a result of capitalist relations of production and the antagonistic separation of town and country" (Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and nature*, 141). For Marx, this social metabolism is a completely natural cycle; however, he argued that it is under capitalism that it becomes unnatural and creates a rift. Interestingly, Marx's idea of this irreparable rift grew out of his readings of Swiss chemist Justus Von Liebig's analysis of soil degradation.

Soil degradation became an increasingly important issue in the nineteenth century: “the depletion of soil fertility was the chief environmental concern of the capitalist society throughout Europe and North America” (Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and nature*, 149), leading to widespread panic. In an effort to identify and solve these issues, Justus Von Liebig founded agricultural chemistry. Liebig studied the work of political economist Henry Carey (1739-1879) and agronomist George Waring (1833-1898) and wrote his 1859 text, *Letters on Modern Agriculture*. “Waring and Carey’s views were to have an important impact on Liebig...and went on to argue that the ‘empirical agriculture’ of the trader gave rise to a ‘spoliation system’” (Foster, 153). Liebig’s spoliation system described a system where: “Cropping of manure, and the removal of produce, cause exhaustion—the spoliation system of agriculture” (Liebig, *Letters on Modern Agriculture*, 138). When resources like foods and fibers are removed from the soil, it depletes the soil of its nutrients, and over time causes infertility. The trade of these resources was a direct consequence of the separation between town and country.

Through his understanding of Liebig’s work, Marx was not only able to understand that the separation between town and country disturbed the metabolic interaction between humans and the earth, but it also allowed him to develop a critique of capitalist exploitation. “Marx was to develop a systematic critique of capitalist exploitation (in the sense of robbery, that is, failing to maintain the means of reproduction) of the soil” (Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and nature*, 155). Marx’s analysis of Liebig’s work centered around capitalism and growing populations in industrial areas. When populations center around urban areas, resources are then transported to those areas, sometimes from hundreds of miles away, to account for the increased population. Marx writes, “This has two results. On the one hand it concentrates the historical motive power of society; on the other hand, it disturbs the metabolic interaction between man

and the earth, i.e. it prevents the return of the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing” (Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, 637). Out of Liebig’s analysis of the trade of produce because of the separation between town and country, Marx was to develop what has since been further elucidated by Foster as the metabolic rift. In Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*, this rift is reproduced through the hunting party and the ways in which Faulkner characterizes their relationship with the woods, first in “The Bear” and then again in “Delta Autumn.”

The hunt is sacred in *Go Down, Moses*. Ike worships the forest and longs to return to the woods each year after the hunt ends. But Through the hunting party, the separation between humans and nature is seen. Harry Thomas explores the tradition of hunting in *Go Down, Moses* in “Hunting Stories & Stories Told About Hunting: What Isaac McCaslin Thinks He Learns In The Big Woods.” “There are rules about when they can hunt, what they can hunt, and how they may hunt it... Contained within that code is the belief that nature and culture are two very separate places” (Thomas, 564). The hunting party is so disconnected from their environment due to the economic competition of capitalism that they must physically enter the wilderness to feel connected with it. That, and the fact that the land that the hunting party hunts on is owned and reserved for hunting shows that these men view nature as something to be exploited.

When Ike returns to the Big Bottom for the last time, he encounters Boon Hogganbeck hoarding a group of squirrels: “Get out of here! Dont touch them! Dont touch a one of them! They’re Mine!” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 315). Faulkner reduces nature to property here. Boon believes that the squirrels are his, and only his, and not only that, this scene shows a lack of ethical restraint. Boon does not hunt the squirrels for any direct need, he does so to dominate nature. He recognizes the squirrels as the objects of his labor rather than living beings. Boon’s individual self believes that he has the right to kill the squirrels, to the point where it has driven

him crazy. He shows possession over judgement. James B. Meriwether examines this scene:

“Boon Hogganbeck is not attempting to destroy that instrument of destruction, and preserve the tree full of squirrels, but is expressing his frustration over being unable to repair the gun and shoot the squirrels himself” (Meriwether, 552). Boon only wants to possess the squirrels, he is demonstrating capitalism’s desire to dominate and possess, he is unable to show ethical restraint because society has forced upon him his role.

The difference between Ike and the rest of the hunting party is that Ike shows ethical restraint, and he has been demonstrating that throughout his time in the wilderness. Ike’s ethical restraint helps him see the metabolic rifts that exist in Yoknapatawpha County. By the time of “The Bear,” Ike starts to view the wilderness as doomed, as something that capitalism has slowly destroyed. “That doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 183). Capitalism has caused the men to fear the wilderness. The irreparable rift between humans and nature in “The Bear” is so large that these people in this capitalist society know nothing else but to exploit it, and make it how they believe it should be, exacting their dominance over it. Ike knows that the wilderness is slowly coming to an end, so he once again employs his ethical restraint to attempt another act of environmental stewardship.

I believe it is necessary here to clarify that every act Ike commits in the wilderness from refraining from shooting the grandfather buck, to swearing he would never shoot Old Ben, to leaving behind the instruments of his labor so he can look upon Old Ben, are all acts of stewardship that he uses his ethical restraint –gained from his ethically independent individualism– to commit.

As Ike realizes that the wilderness is doomed throughout "The Bear," so does the killing of Old Ben become more and more inevitable. In order for Ike to preserve his social metabolism and protect the ecological order, he knows he must break his vow to never fire at the bear. "I know it, 'the boy said. 'That's why it must be one of us'" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 201), Ike says to Sam as they both realize that Old Ben's killing is inevitable. Ike's original vow was to never fire at the bear, a vow that was an expression of his ethically independent individualism and unalienated relationship with nature. However, when the bear's death becomes inevitable with the emergence of Lion, Ike knows that only he or Sam could kill Old Ben without it being exploitative and alienated.

Old Ben ends up being killed by Lion and Boon. Whether or not Ike's decision not to shoot Old Ben is an act of stewardship is a difficult question because, first: Ike makes a vow never to fire his gun at the bear, and second: Ike decides that he or Sam must be the ones to kill Old Ben in order to make sure his death is not exploitative, and third: Ike does not end up firing at Old Ben. When looking at Old Ben's death from Ike's original vow, it is indeed an act of stewardship that he did not shoot him. Ike shows ethical restraint and care for the natural world, fitting the definition of an environmental steward. However, when looking at Old Ben's death after Ike decides he or Sam must be the ones to kill him, the act of stewardship becomes unclear. When the time came to shoot Old Ben, Ike could not justify it ethically, it conflicted with his principles. Pulling the trigger, even though he decided that he had to, would violate his principle of stewardship. Looking past stewardship, this refusal of Ike's shows his ethically independent individualism. Ike's moral compass governs his actions even when he feels an ethical duty for something.

Old Ben's death symbolizes the end of the wilderness for Ike. "It was like the last act on a set stage. It was the beginning of the end of something, he didn't know what except that he would not grieve. He would be humble and proud that he had been found worthy to be a part of it too or even just to see it too" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 214). Ike had known that the doomed wilderness was diminishing, but it is the moment that Old Ben is killed that he fully realizes that it is gone, and this causes him to act on his ethical principles. Ike knows that he cannot preserve the wilderness itself, so much like his decision not to shoot Old Ben, he is guided by his moral compass and makes his final act of stewardship, which is one of repudiation.

After Ike formally repudiates the McCaslin plantation, he moves into the town of Jefferson, away from the wilderness, "living in one small cramped fireless rented room in a Jefferson boarding-house" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 285). Ike's repudiation does not free him from his family's curse, it isolates him from his community. This presents the paradox of Ike's individualism. Theoretically, Ike's repudiation should free him from his social alienation, while maintaining his environmental un-alienation, but in fact it does the opposite. Whether Ike's intention was to not further implicate himself in the destruction of the environment, or that he wanted nothing more to do with his family's past, he is left more alienated after his repudiation than he was before. What Ike views as a curse is in itself a metabolic rift, and removing himself from the land will not break that curse, it only makes it greater. The individualism that led Ike to repudiate his inheritance was produced by the same system that produced the metabolic rift. Ike has failed to bridge the gap between town and country, and he always will as long as he lives under capitalism.

According to Marx, the division between town and country in a capitalist society is a result of the division of labor. Marx described this in *The German Ideology*: "The division of

labor inside a nation leads at first to the separation of industrial and commercial from agricultural labor, and hence to the separation of town and country” (Marx, *The German Ideology*, 8). This division of labor arises from private property: “The various stages of development in the division of labor are just so many different forms of ownership” (9). As long as ownership exists in Yoknapatawpha County, so will the division of labor, therefore making Ike unable to bridge the gap between town and country, and leaving him always alienated from either his environment or society. Marx writes, “the subjection of the individual under the division of labor, makes one man into a restricted town-animal, the other into a restricted country-animal, and daily creates anew the conflict between their interests...as long as the latter exists, private property must exist” (39). Ike, once again, is a unique case because while in the wilderness, he essentially existed outside of the division of labor, because his labor was completely unalienated. So in the wilderness, Ike is not what Marx described as a restricted-country animal, it is only when he moves into Jefferson that Ike becomes a restricted town-animal, even though he rejects it. Ike is both a restricted country-animal as well as a restricted farm-animal, but always alternatively, never simultaneously.

After Ike becomes a restricted town-animal, his life becomes far more alienated than it was while he lived on the plantation. Ike has become metabolically trapped. While Ike lived on the plantation, his labor mediated his relation with nature, but he was socially estranged. In Jefferson, he has no way of mediating his relationship with nature. The food Ike consumes is not grown or hunted by him, the house he lives in is made of exploited timber, but he does not steward the land. Ike is no longer directly involved with the activities of his labor, Ike knows he is metabolically trapped, yet he still rejects ownership. In the first story of *Go Down, Moses* “Was,” Faulkner describes an older Ike as “a widower the twenty years, who in all his life had

owned but one object more than he could wear and carry in his pockets and his hands at one time” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 5). But rejection of ownership is not the same for Ike in Jefferson as it was in the wilderness. In the wilderness, Ike did not need property to mediate his relation to nature, in fact, his rejection of property actually strengthened his relationship because Ike was able to mediate his labor through ethical restraint and ethically independent individualism. In the wilderness, Ike’s rejection resulted in un-alienation. In Jefferson, however, Ike’s rejection results in powerlessness. In Jefferson, no metabolic interaction with nature is direct.

As a carpenter, Ike’s labor is indirect, it becomes alienated. “With his kit of brand-new carpenter’s tools and the shotgun McCaslin had given him with his name engraved in silver and old General Compson’s compass (and when the General died, his silver-mounted horn too)” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 285). Ike is likely not in control of the products he creates, he likely does not cut his own timber, his labor is completely alienated. Ike’s rejection of ownership and eschewment of material possessions is his attempt to continue his stewardship even while he lives in Jefferson, and it is an attempt that is ultimately doomed.

It is important to note here that many scholars believe individual acts of stewardship to be a failure of stewardship. In a 2007 interview with Foster on his work, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, he discusses how individualism in terms of ecological preservation, in his Marxist view, is meaningless:

Greens in the US tend to emphasise individualism. According to this view we should solve the problems of the earth by recycling and reducing our consumption. In terms of the structures of the system, this doesn’t make very much sense at all. Having a new spiritual relationship to the earth is OK and acting as individuals to defend the earth is

commendable, but if we can't change our material practices and social relations, then such spirituality and individual action is meaningless (Foster).

Foster suggests that individuals practicing green solutions like recycling have very little effect as a whole. It is through collective action and systemic change that any progress in environmental sustainability will be achieved. Foster does not say that individual action is bad, he simply says that it is not an adequate solution.

Terry Townsend examines individual solutions in "Climate Change: A Marxist Analysis," saying: "Gore and others urge us to lead 'carbon-neutral 'lives...while also relying on the capitalist market, nudged along by so-called "green" taxes and legislative regulations" (Townsend, 15). Townsend critiques former vice president Al Gore's approach to the climate crisis saying, in agreement with Foster:

Of course, we should not dismiss the importance of environmental consciousness and radicalisation, which is often expressed in attempts to live in ways consistent with sustainability. It is a good thing if people try to organise their lives so that they live more ecologically.

But we have to be clear that that alone will not be enough to halt the crisis. It certainly cannot be the main strategy of the mass environment movement, as it will let the real culprits off the hook and divert precious activist energy away from the underlying systemic dynamic that is driving ecological degradation.

Like Foster, Townsend does not dismiss individual action as a form of stewardship, but renders it useless. Townsend argues that by reducing climate change to individual action, the 'real culprits 'will not be held accountable. Of course it is good to reduce your carbon footprint, but the real issue lies within the system. It does, however, take the individual to notice and

understand the metabolic rifts that exist in any society before any change can be made. It is the convincing of the rest and the actual dismantling of the system that then remains. This presents the question of: was it ever Ikes's goal to halt the environmental crisis and dismantle the system, or simply play no part in it?

Ike's goal was not to change the world, but to live morally in that unchangeable world. Ike actually succeeds in doing this. He successfully mediates his relationship with nature and rejects capitalism by repudiating his inheritance, but where Ike fails is in choosing innocence over responsibility. So Ike's failure is not that he failed to transcend capitalism through his ethically independent individualism; because the capitalist system is inescapable, he would have failed every time. His failure is that he recognizes what is right, but takes no responsibility to address the systemic issues of capitalism, however, this failure is not a personal failure of Ike's at all, it is a failure of the system. So perhaps it would be wrong to classify this failure as Ikes, but rather an historical failure. Faulkner makes this tragically clear in the penultimate story in *Go Down, Moses*, "Delta Autumn."

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CHAPTER TWO

FAULKNER'S TRAGIC INSIGHT

Faulkner's tragic insight reveals not only that innocence does not redeem you, but that ethical clarity can often result in isolation and withdrawal and cannot in itself change a systemic structure. Isaac McCaslin's failure to take responsibility for his family's history creates not only a devastating retelling of history, but it also ensures that nothing will change. So why does Ike fail to take responsibility? It is Ike's ethically independent individualism that leads him on his journey towards moral clarity, which causes him to see and understand the metabolic ruptures in Yoknapatawpha County; however, his perception of these ruptures is then distorted into something spiritual rather than something material. Ike gains moral clarity gradually through the teachings of Sam Fathers and his experiences in the wilderness, and it all leads to the pivotal moment in Ike's life: when he reads the plantation ledgers.

The land, the fields and what they represented in terms of cotton gained and sold, the men and women whom they fed and clothed and even paid little cash money at Christmas-time in return for the labor which planted and raised and picked and ginned the cotton, the machinery and mules and gear with which they raised it and their cost and upkeep and replacement – that whole edifice intricate and complex and founded upon injustice and erected by the ruthless rapacity and carried on even yet with at times downright savagery not only to the human beings but the valuable animals too... (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 283-284).

Ike can see that the ledgers represent the material relations of the plantation, and they let him see the entire network of extracted labor and exploited labor which in turn disrupts the natural cycles

of the land. However, where Ike fails in interpreting the ledgers is that he interprets them morally and morally alone.

Ike is unable or unwilling to see that the entire network of exploitation and extracted labor on the McCaslin plantation requires material intervention in order to change. He can only perceive it in a moral way, and this is a result of the way that Faulkner shapes Ike's consciousness. Since childhood, Ike's mind has been shaped to see the wilderness as sacred; this goes back to Sam Fathers. Ike develops an extreme ethical awareness and sensitivity from Sam Fathers: "he taught the boy the woods, to hunt, when to shoot and when not to shoot, when to kill and when not to kill, and better, what to do with it afterward" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 162). This is about more than hunting skills, it's about ethical discernment. Ike learned from Sam Fathers not just how to kill, but when it is right and wrong to kill, and most importantly, how to act afterward. Sam passes on to Ike not only reverence for the land and awareness, but also the idea that history matters. After Sam marks Ike's face with the blood of his first kill, Faulkner suggests that Sam is doing more than marking him as a hunter: "Sam Fathers had marked him indeed, not as a mere hunter, but with something Sam had had in his turn of his vanished and forgotten people" (173). Sam marks Ike's face with a consciousness of history. Sam is transmitting the knowledge of his vanished ancestors, the knowledge before plantations and ownership, onto Ike, and Ike becomes part of this lineage that stands outside of capitalism. Ike, however, cannot be part of Sam's lineage because he exists within the lineage of the capitalists, which is why when he reads the plantation ledgers, the consciousness of history that Sam transmitted onto him turns into ancestral guilt.

Ike converts Sam's ethical teachings into ancestral guilt. It is the moment when he reads the ledgers when he turns twenty-one that that guilt becomes realized. It is worth asking

two questions: first, did Ike have any guilt before reading the ledgers? Before reading the ledgers, Ike does not have ancestral guilt, but he does have a personal, immediate guilt accompanied by an historical awareness, hence his attempts at environmental stewardship like refusing to shoot Old Ben. In the wilderness, Ike feels guilty for his personal actions and how he contributes to the metabolic ruptures, but he does not yet feel guilty for plantation wrongdoing. And second: after reading the ledgers, is Ike able to continue living without having ancestral guilt? To live without guilt, Ike would have to first ignore the concrete records of injustice within the ledgers, and second, he would have to reject Sam's moral teachings. Ike cannot do either of these things. Ike has guilt before and after reading the ledgers; both forms of guilt, however, are spiritual/ancestral, not material.

Marx recognized that true responsibility is material. Going back to his conception of materialism, we can see that life determines consciousness, in other words, the material conditions of life determine consciousness. In his theses on Feuerbach, Marx argued that "the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations" (Marx, Theses 6). If, according to Marx, human essence is constituted by social relations, then injustice and any wrongdoing by humans must also exist within social relations. So to take responsibility for these wrongdoings must entail a material response because social relations are inherently a material thing. Going back to Marx's four types of alienation, we can see that in each form, the alienation is material: the alienation from the product, from the process, from the species-being, and from the self are all rooted in material and social conditions. So we can assume that something as simple as an awareness, and even a profound sense of guilt, is not enough to overcome alienation, it must be material systematic change. All that Ike has, and

all that Ike is able to give, however, is an awareness of the injustice and a sense of guilt in its perpetuation.

The tragedy is that Ike can see the injustice of the capitalist system but is unable or unwilling to act materially. Ike remains an individual within a system that requires the whole of society in order to change. David H. Evans examines this tragedy in “Taking the Place of Nature: ‘The Bear ’and the Incarnation of America:”

What renders Ike such a problematic protagonist is not, as is often argued, the practical futility of his decision to renounce the world to pursue a private salvation, but his prior claim to have attained a position and perspective from which to read the true meaning of history. Ike imagines that he has reached the point from which he can comprehend and pass moral judgement on the human, and specifically the American past (Evans, 182).

It is true that Ike reaches a point where he believes himself to be morally pure; his act of repudiation reveals that he believes he can pass moral judgement because it is framed as an ethical response to historical wrongdoing. However, I would make the claim that Ike is not a problematic protagonist due to an unearned sense or moral superiority but because his choices and his beliefs are not his own, but something produced by the system that he lives under. Ike’s inability to act materially and take responsibility is not only a failure, but also a consequence of his material reality. Ike’s consciousness is formed by the system that he lives under, and as Marx said: it is life that determines consciousness. Ike’s understanding of right and wrong and his morality are products of the system, so taking responsibility materially is something that is impossible for him.

Ike cannot take true responsibility because his moral consciousness prevents him from doing so. True responsibility for Ike would be challenging property laws, redistributing the land and making it a place of ecological preservation, but this would require Ike taking power, and power for Ike is tainted because of the ancestral guilt that he feels as a result of his moral consciousness and historical awareness. Because of his social estrangement, Ike is alienated from the very system that constitutes power, making him unable to take any power himself. As I examined earlier, Ike sits in a unique place in society, being part of neither the working class nor the non-working class, but he is still socially estranged. Ike's social estrangement renders any attempt made by him to intervene in the system of capitalism impossible.

An important distinction to make here has to do with Ike's inability to act materially in the social world (the plantation) versus his ability to act in the wilderness. Ike cannot act materially in the social world, he is socially estranged, but there are many times when he is seen materially intervening in the natural world. So why is Ike unable to translate his material action in the wilderness into material action in society? This raises another question: does the wilderness exist outside of capitalism? If the answer is yes, then it would explain why Ike can act materially in the wilderness but not in society, but it is more complicated than that. Structurally, the wilderness cannot exist outside of capitalism because it depends on it. The land is privately owned, the hunting camp exists because of plantation wealth, the labor of Sam Fathers is what keeps the hunting camp alive; everything about the hunt depends on capitalist wealth and labor. However, this does not mean that the wilderness does not feel as if it's outside of capitalism. Compared to the plantation, the wilderness has not been completely enfolded in capitalism. So Ike can act materially in the wilderness because labor is immediate and power is not based on property, but on knowledge. That Ike can materially intervene in the wilderness, like not

shooting the grandfather buck, or simply looking upon Old Ben, does not mean, however, that he can translate that material intervention into the social world.

Just like the wilderness itself, Ike cannot exist outside of capitalism either. Even after Ike refuses his inheritance and essentially ceases to be a capitalist (and is not a member of the working class either), he is still embedded in the system as a whole. But ironically being embedded within the system does not give him the power to intervene in it. Ike's moral awakening, accompanied by his social estrangement, ensures that he cannot materially intervene to repair it even as he remains embedded. The McCaslin plantation extracts resources without restoring ecological balance, it exploits the land, and it exploits labor; it is the site of metabolic rift and it exists socially within the system of capitalism, but Ike is socially estranged. There is nothing that Ike can do to intervene in the plantation because this would require material action. Material intervention would require Ike to engage with the system, which is something that he cannot morally do because he is conscientiously detached. When Ike argues with Cass in the commissary, Faulkner shows that Ike's relationship with the plantation is socially detached: "Granted that my people brought the curse onto the land: maybe for that reason their descendants alone can – not resist it, not combat it – maybe just endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted" (Faulkner, 265). Ike exists as an observer, or even an endurer, not as a participant. Ike acknowledges the fact that he cannot intervene materially, but instead only "endure and outlast it." Ike enduring and outlasting the so-called curse that his ancestors brought onto the land proves that he recognizes the injustice, but cannot do anything about it because he is socially estranged.

Ike may be socially estranged, but he is not ecologically estranged. So what does Ike's profound connection with nature have to say about his inability to take material action? It

actually reinforces why Ike is unable to take material action, because all it gives him is his moral responsibility. The lesson of the wilderness is humility rather than mastery, but because the economic system around Ike is fixed, his insight can only provide him with moral responsibility, not social authority. Also, Ike's connection with nature diverts his focus from the systems of humans onto the natural world. It is clear from the very beginning of Ike's time in the wilderness that it is his sole interest and focus. In "The Old People," when Ike is still too young to go to the Big Bottom, it completely occupies his mind: "whispering to himself" "Soon now. Soon now. Just three more years" (or two more or one more) "and I will be ten. Then Cass said I can go" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 161). The wilderness almost completely takes up Ike's mind when he is not in it. He longs to return when he's not there, and he does not want to leave while he is there: "This is just Thursday. I'll come home Sunday night on one of those horses. I'll come home Sunday, then. I'll make up the time I lost studying Sunday night. McCaslin...I've got to stay, 'he said. 'I've got to'" (237). Ike's consciousness revolves around the wilderness, this causes his ethical engagement to be solely directed towards nature. It is also worth mentioning that Faulkner explicitly writes about Ike's wilderness experiences and pays no attention to his life for the parts of the year when he is not there. Why does Faulkner do this though? Ike's life outside of the wilderness is neither explored nor possible within the vision of Ike that Faulkner conveys. Ike's life on the plantation is avoided because it would likely undermine the ethical story. Ike is not able to live ethically on the plantation because it is structurally corrupt, it would only highlight Ike's powerlessness. For Ike, the only possible way to live ethically is to withdraw, and the wilderness acts as his way to withdraw, until it too diminishes, so he retreats to innocence to preserve his purity.

Retreating to innocence becomes Ike's only moral option. His purity is his moral opposition to the unjust system. Because Ike understands that he cannot materially intervene, his only option is to withdraw. In his 1852 essay: "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," Marx wrote: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte"). Ike's withdrawal is structurally determined. The history of ecological exploitation and injustice in Yoknapatawpha County is structural, and an individual like Ike does not possess the power to dismantle that structure alone. Ike is constrained by the structure that history created. However, even in his retreat to innocence, Ike is still unable to live unimplicated in the exploitative system of capitalism.

Ike's retreat to Jefferson to preserve his purity reveals that he cannot live unimplicated from capitalism. The implications of capitalism in Yoknapatawpha County are structural, not personal. No matter what Ike does (choosing innocence and retreating to Jefferson), he will never be able to escape the exploitative system of capitalism. The conditions that produced the structure that Ike lives under pre-date him, so he cannot just step outside of that system by refusing it. The key distinction here is that structural implication is different from personal guilt. Ike may refuse to partake in the destruction of the environment, but the world that sustains him is built on the exploitation of that natural world. In essence, history is not something that Ike can simply step out of.

So if Ike will live implicated in capitalism no matter his choice, this raises the question: is the pursuit of ethically independent individualism irrelevant? For Marx, the pursuit of ethically independent individualism is not necessarily irrelevant, but historically insufficient.

In the opening line for the general rules of the International Workingmen's Association of 1864, Marx wrote: "The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves" (Marx). The ethically independent person cannot change the system alone. This goes back to the Marxist idea that collective action is required for a structural change. Morally, Ike's ethically independent individualism is not irrelevant, but it is historically ineffective. The system does not care that there are individuals who possess an ethically independent individualism, because it is never enough to dismantle the system. These people, like Ike, will always get shut out. The pursuit of ethically independent individualism being historically ineffective is why Faulkner never imagines escape.

Faulkner never imagines escape from the system because it is historically impossible. Ike can preserve his moral consciousness, but he will never escape from the material and historical system of capitalism because, the capitalist system is totalizing. Even in his other novels, Faulkner never imagines an escape from the system. Let us look briefly at Joe Christmas from *Light In August*. Like Ike, Joe Christmas is in an unusual place in society:

He did not look like a professional hobo in his professional rags, but there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home. And that he carried this knowledge with him always as though it were a banner, with a quality ruthless, lonely, and almost proud (Faulkner, *Light In August*, 21).

Joe Christmas is a racially ambiguous character in Faulkner's 1932 novel. He is alienated from society because he is rejected by both the whites and the blacks. Joe's loneliness is a structural class issue, not a self-imposed identity. Joe may wear his identity proudly, but just like Ike, his social estrangement is a consequence of the system, and his moral awareness is not enough to

overcome that. Joe is aware that he is out of place in society, he “carried this knowledge with him always,” but that knowledge alone is not enough to change that. Both *Light In August* and *Go Down, Moses* explore the same themes but in different contexts, the one focusing primarily on class, the other on race. However, the message is the same, and Faulkner sends this message on purpose. He knows the system is inescapable and he uses Ike and Joe to dramatize his tragic insight.

We can also look at Addie Bundren from *As I Lay Dying*, who longs to escape the oppressive system of capitalism. Now this example, like Joe Christmas, differs from Ike in the sense that it does not highlight the ecological issues that capitalism brings, but I think it’s important to address how Faulkner shows the impossibilities of escape from the system in his other novels. Addie, the mother of the Bundren children, tells her husband Anse that she wants to be buried in the town of Jefferson (the same Jefferson from *Go Down, Moses*) so she can be reunited with her family. For the entire novel, Addie lays dead while her family makes the journey from their isolated, rural farm. However, Faulkner gives Addie one chapter in the novel where she reflects on her life. “I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die” (Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 176). Faulkner characterizes Addie as someone who had a deep internal anger towards the system. And just like Ike, she is painfully aware of her familial and social obligations and her entrapment within them.

Through his fiction, Faulkner is asking the question: how do morally aware individuals survive in a totalizing system? For Ike, the answer to this is to withdraw. This is why Faulkner

never portrays Ike considering a revolutionary working class movement that could repair the system, or even writing a book that would expose injustice, like Henry David Thoreau.

Faulkner never imagines Ike doing any of these things, because that is not his focus. Even though collective forces may begin with individual action, Ike's individual action will never be enough to start a movement. The famous line from *The Communist Manifesto*: "Workingmen of all countries, Unite!" (Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 73), suggests that only through joining together can the system be dismantled. But surely the idea to join together originated from the individual? Yes, it must, but in Ike's case, he is too isolated to form a collective resistance. In a Marxist sense, the workers who would unite together are isolated, but not as absolutely as Ike is. It is their shared alienation in their material reality that makes collective action for workers possible. Ike has neither shared experiences with others nor is embedded within class position. So Ike is essentially forced to live in spiritual penury; he has a rich consciousness, but a powerlessness in history. It is in the penultimate story of *Go Down, Moses*, "Delta Autumn" where the consequences of Ike's systemic inability are most starkly revealed.

In "Delta Autumn" we see an older Ike traveling hundreds of miles from Jefferson to the Mississippi Delta on a hunting trip. It strongly mirrors the hunting trips that Ike took in his youth, only this time his hunting companions are a part of the new generation of hunters and the wilderness itself has contracted. The goal of the hunting trip may remain the same – to hunt – but the circumstances of the hunt are vastly different from the times at the Big Bottom when Ike was young. Faulkner shows the changed landscape and the consequences of metabolic rift as extreme, and irreversible:

At first there had been only the old towns along the River and the old towns along the hills, from each of which the planters with their gangs of slaves and then hired laborers had wrested from the impenetrable jungle of water-standing cane and cypress, gum and holly and oak and ash, cotton patches which as the years passed became fields and then plantations. The paths made by deer and bear became roads and then highways, with towns in turn springing up along them and along the rivers Tallahatchie and Sunflower which joined and became the Yazoo... Most of that was gone now. Now man drove two hundred miles from Jefferson before he found wilderness to hunt in (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 323-324).

As Ike and his younger companions – the heir to the McCaslin plantation, Roth Edmonds being one of them – drive to the wilderness, much further away than it once was, we can see the irreversible nature of the exploitative system. In Ike's lifetime (it has been roughly fifty years since his repudiation), the wilderness has been destroyed almost completely. Animal paths have turned to highways, and the once unrelenting wilderness has turned to cotton pastures. The place that Ike went to escape the system is gone, and this new place he travels to will never be able to offer that same escape.

The wilderness had long been embedded within capitalism, but not so absolutely as it is in "Delta Autumn." Faulkner shows that the wilderness in the Mississippi Delta is being rapidly encroached upon by the system of 20th century industrialization and legal enforcement: "And not just because there is a man with a badge to watch us. We probably won't even see him unless maybe he will stop here about noon tomorrow and eat dinner with us and check our licenses" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 331). Compared to the Big Bottom where Ike went in his youth, where the capitalist system was still present, but muted, the wilderness in the Mississippi Delta is

hemmed in by a system that is now a dominant, still-growing thing. When older Ike makes this comment to his younger companions that they will likely not see the man with the blue badge, it raises the question: why is this younger generation so concerned about seeing this man at all?

The younger generation is so embedded in the system that their accountability reflects both legal authority and legal submission. This is a strong contrast to Ike, whose accountability is tied to ethical and ecological responsibility.

The wilderness, still a place of relative autonomy – though not so much as when Ike was young – is now heavily influenced by the system. When Ike was young, his concerns rested on ecological and ethical engagement with the woods, whereas the newer younger generation's concerns rest on complying with the system. This shift shows how much more enmeshed in capitalism the wilderness in "Delta Autumn" is compared to it in "The Bear." So the wilderness has largely ceased to be a place of ethical withdrawal.

The place that Ike was able to morally connect with to the point of total un-alienation is nearly gone. Labor in the wilderness was reciprocal for Ike in his youth. The rite of passage for Ike to enter the wilderness was once a thing of humility: the leaving of his gun, compass and watch was something that he had to do, there had to be a level of mutual respect. Faulkner shows the completion of metabolic rift with the transformation of the wilderness into a place where moral and ethical engagement become nearly impossible.

The encroaching system of capitalism in the wilderness causes it to lose its capacity of unalienated ethical action for Ike. The metabolic rifts in Yoknapatawpha County have become so irreversible that even Ike is unable to engage ethically in the wilderness by the time of "Delta Autumn." Ike's ethical engagement with the wilderness largely came from his position in society and his control over his productive life in the wilderness, which, of course, came from Sam

Fathers. Going back to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, we can see that ethical engagement is possible only when alienation is overcome:

The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its life activity. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being. Or it is only because he is a species-being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 76).

For Marx, animals cannot act ethically because they are instinctual and cannot reflect on what they are doing. Ike's labor in the wilderness is not purely instinctual, it is guided by his morality. In the wilderness in his youth, Ike is essentially Marx's species-being in action, not constrained by capitalist labor production systems that would alienate him. In essence, Ike is free during his time in the wilderness in his youth. However, by the time of "Delta Autumn" the wilderness that allowed him this ethical engagement is gone. Both Foster and Marx adopt the idea that ethical engagement is now only truly possible through the collective. In *Capital* volume three, Marx wrote: "Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control" (Marx, *Capital* Volume 3, 959). And Foster argues that it is imperative "to recognise that human beings have a responsibility to establish a sustainable relationship to nature. But in this, we can't flee to nature – in some way retreat to some idyll where these problems did not exist" (Foster, 2007 Interview). Foster is saying that retreat to nature is not

sustainable. This is why Ike's freedom (his ethical engagement) is temporary under capitalism.

The tragedy is that the wilderness that once allowed Ike ethical and material engagement is gone, and just like in the social world, Ike's moral clarity is now unable to translate into any action.

I think it is necessary to make it clear that Ike still has his moral clarity and ethically independent individualism in "Delta Autumn," but it is more symbolic than actionable. It is no longer actionable in the wilderness as it was during his youth. So, essentially it mimics his material action in society in that it has no material use. This is why his moral clarity is tested in "Delta Autumn" when the black woman who carries Roth Edmonds' child shows up to the hunting camp. She remains unnamed, but is the granddaughter of Tennie's Jim. The woman shows up in an attempt to get Roth to claim some form of responsibility for her unborn child, but Roth is not at the camp when this happens, it's only Ike. After a conversation, Ike exclaims to the woman: "'Then go, 'he said. Then he cried again in that thin not loud grieving voice: 'Get out of here! I can do nothing for you! Cant nobody do nothing for you!'" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 344). This scene closely mirrors Ike's inability to take material action on the plantation, resulting in his retreat to a supposed innocence. Ike telling the woman to leave shows the limits of his ethical position, which ends almost before it even begins. He may realize that Roth's actions were unjust, but he cannot do anything about it materially. In this woman, Ike can see that history is repeating itself, and he, just like before, wants nothing to do with it. By shewing away the woman, Ike is once again trying to retreat into innocence. This reveals two things: one, that the wilderness is no longer the wilderness. If it had been the same wilderness from Ike's youth, there is a possibility that he could act materially in this situation, but it has become socially engulfed in capitalism, mirroring the plantation. And two, it reveals, once again, Faulkner's tragic insight.

Ike can only have ethical clarity in isolation, but as I have already stated, that is not enough to materially change the system. Faulkner now shows in “Delta Autumn” that Ike’s isolation and withdrawal no longer even preserve his own innocence. In the beginning, Ike’s withdrawal felt meaningful because there was a place that existed for him partially outside of capitalism that could embody his ethics, but that place is now gone. This moment in the Mississippi Delta proves just how true it is that withdrawal is historically ineffective. It is clear that Ike still maintains his moral clarity all these years later in the Mississippi Delta, but his moral freedom proves to be only temporary and somewhat hollow. So how then, was Ike able to retain his moral clarity the whole time he lived in Jefferson? Because he was still holding onto those experiences from his time in the wilderness during his youth. Just because his life in Jefferson constrained him does not mean that it destroyed his moral clarity. Also, Ike is never fully aware of the state of the wilderness during his time in Jefferson, so before he truly sees it, it’s still the same wilderness from his youth. So this moment in the Mississippi Delta reveals Ike’s moral clarity, going all the way back to his youth was only temporarily effective and temporarily substantial.

When Ike was young, the wilderness was a place of reverence and initiation. Ike had to earn his entry into the big woods. Now the hunt feels like a nostalgic reenactment. The entire time at the hunting camp in the delta, Ike cannot stop remembering the hunt with Major de Spain and Sam Fathers. The hunt is no longer about creating new memories, but remembering the past. “That was sixty years ago, when the Big Bottom was only thirty miles from Jefferson and old Major de Spain, who had been his father’s cavalry commander... had taken him into the woods for the first time. Old Sam Fathers was still alive then” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 333). Ike’s constant remembrance of things past acts as a way for him to continue withdrawing from the

truth. Through his retreat into nostalgia, Ike is understanding that what once allowed him to have ethical engagement no longer exists.

So if all of the things that Ike's moral clarity and ethical engagement depend on have collapsed by the time of "Delta Autumn," will his moral clarity and ethical engagement eventually collapse too? Ike's moral clarity can endure, but his ethical engagement cannot. Ike can still understand what is right and what is wrong, but his ability to act upon that in any way is gone. The un-alienated relationship that he once had with the wilderness has turned to one of alienation. So if Ike's profoundly unalienated relationship with nature was what allowed him to understand the metabolic rifts and act as an environmental steward, then his alienated relationship with nature in "Delta Autumn" obviates that stewardship. There no longer exists a space where Ike can ethically engage materially. What really collapses for Ike upon his return to the wilderness is his freedom.

Marx's realm of freedom is realized "only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends" (Marx, *Capital* Volume 3, 959), meaning that as long as people must work to survive, or under the exploitation of capitalism, then freedom is impossible. And this freedom, described by Marx in *Capital* volume three, is a social thing, not a thing of the individual. Thus, while this realm of freedom was experienced by Ike in his youth, it could only be temporary, because it was individual rather than collective. The timeline from Ike's belief in the realm of freedom to his realization that true freedom is impossible within the system is perfectly captured in his reflection on the past:

I slew you; my bearing must not shame your quitting life. My conduct forever onward must become your death; marking him for that and for more than that: that day and himself and McCaslin juxtaposed not against the wilderness but against the tamed

land, the old wrong and shame itself, in repudiation and denial at least of the land and the wrong and shame even if he couldn't cure the wrong and eradicate the shame, who at fourteen when he learned of it had believed he could do both when he became competent and when at twenty-one he became competent he knew that he could do neither but at least he could repudiate the wrong and the shame, at least in principle (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 334).

This line from “Delta Autumn” shows Ike remembering his first kill when Sam Fathers marked his face. This represents Ike’s early belief that his future actions might redeem the past. At the age of fourteen, Ike lives on the assumption that consciousness can meaningfully transform the world. In Marxist terms, this would be an idealistic stage of freedom. At the age of twenty-one, Ike realizes the historical constraint. He realizes that he cannot step outside of history and that history cannot be undone by his own moral will. And upon this realization, Ike retreats to preserve his moral freedom when he knows that he cannot preserve his material freedom: “at least he could repudiate the wrong and the shame.” The culmination of this timeline for Ike occurs when he sees that the wilderness no longer offers that same illusion of freedom in “Delta Autumn.”

What Ike does possess throughout his entire timeline is moral awareness, but that alone is not enough for Marx’s realm of freedom. It becomes painfully clear that Ike’s ethical withdrawal was more of an historical absence when Roth asks him: “‘So you’ve lived almost eighty years. ’Edmonds said. ‘And that’s what you finally learned about the other animals you lived among. I suppose the question to ask you is, where have you been all the time you were dead?’” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 329). Roth’s use of the word dead implies that Ike’s absence was a social absence. Ike’s refusal of his inheritance meant absolutely nothing

materially. It was an idealistic dream, and this is what makes Faulkner's insight so tragic.

Nothing changed, and there was nothing Ike could have done about it.

So, the question now is: is Marx's realm of freedom truly possible in Faulkner's literary world? For Ike, at least, the realm of freedom is only imaginable. Ike can live temporarily in the realm of freedom but it will never be sustainable. The freedom that Faulkner shows does not always align with Marx. Faulkner's freedom is individual rather than collective and ecological rather than social. So the simple answer to this question is, no, it is not possible. This is why reading the novel through the lens of metabolic rift is important. When Ike was young, the irreparable rift in the wilderness was not fully realized. The wilderness was still a place of relative autonomy, and capitalism had not fully taken it over yet. This is why Ike was able to have a momentary escape into the realm of freedom. By the time of "Delta Autumn," capitalism has fully engulfed the wilderness, the irreparable rift is dominant and irreversible. So Ike's small glimpse of freedom was only possible because the rift had not been completed yet. And what makes this so tragic is that Ike can see this, he knows by the time of "Delta Autumn" that his moral clarity is not enough.

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CONCLUSION

William Faulkner shapes Isaac McCaslin's mind to be ethically pure and morally individualistic, which is uncommon within the capitalist society of Yoknapatawpha County. Private property under capitalism, which is born when capitalists buy up small scale property and turn it into large landed property, creates a chain reaction where alienation leads to the separation between humans and nature leading to the emergence of metabolic rifts and a false individualism among the capitalists. Ike is different though. Through the teachings of Sam Fathers, Ike is able to recognize the metabolic rifts in Yoknapatawpha County, revealing the paradox of Ike McCaslin. It is the capitalist system in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County that lets Ike's ethically independent individualism take the shape that it does. His moral beliefs become intelligible only within the system he lives under. The very ethics that Ike lives by depend on the concept of private property, and his final moral act of renouncing his inheritance only makes sense under a system where private property is the central principle. So Ike's entire moral code is defined by the system he rejects, but even in his rejection, he is still implicated. And this is what makes Ike tragic.

Faulkner's tragic insight reveals that recognition of injustice is not enough to overcome it. The system as a whole must be overcome. At first, Ike appears as someone who has the possibility to transcend capitalism because of his ethically independent individualism. In the beginning, in "The Old People" and "The Bear" when Ike is still a child, the wilderness largely exists outside of capitalism. Ike can retreat to this place of moral purity outside of the domination of capitalism and he can exercise his ethically independent individualism. And when Ike does retreat to the wilderness, Faulkner shows his profoundly unalienated relationship with nature. Ike does not contribute to the metabolic rifts and even attempts to reverse them at times with his

small acts of stewardship. In the woods, Ike's labor is completely unalienated, allowing him to ethically engage with the wilderness and practice his individualism. This is precisely why Faulkner never writes about Ike's life outside of the wilderness, because it would be one of alienation. In the wilderness, Ike is able to escape the history that created the system that he lives under. However, as Marx says: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte"), meaning that Ike can only live so long without the burden of history, and with the shrinking wilderness, the time when Ike will have to confront this history is inevitable. It is when he reads the plantation ledgers that history begins to shape his material life.

The knowledge of history completely upends Ike's material life. By his twenty-first birthday when he refuses his inheritance, the wilderness no longer serves as the place for Ike to escape the system, and his moral purity prevents him from acting materially, so he retreats to innocence instead, but not by his own choice. Ike feels he must retain his moral purity, and retreating to innocence is the only way for him to do that. In the end, Ike embodies less a failure of individualism than but simply another result or product of capitalism.

Just as Ike is shaped by history, individuals today are shaped by historical conditions. The same patterns that Faulkner dramatizes in *Go Down, Moses* of individual action being constrained by the system and ecological devastation being a consequence of history continue in the present. The same capitalism that exists in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County exists in the real world, and in a way, Faulkner is anticipating the environmental consequences of capitalism. And it is these same consequences that continue to shape the modern world.

Reading the novel through the Marxist lens of metabolic rift underscores the contemporary relevance of *Go Down, Moses*. Faulkner shows us the powerlessness of the individual under a capitalist society in the face of ecological disruption and systemic injustice. Without metabolic rift, Ike's renunciation of his inheritance feels more like a personal moral decision rather than a response to a structural problem. This is why reading *Go Down, Moses* through the lens of metabolic rift is important: it changes the understanding of the novel from a personal failure about Isaac McCaslin into a structural critique of social and ecological systems. However, the metabolic rifts in Yoknapatawpha County are not simply the result of individual choices, they are deeply embedded in the system, according the history of that county the inevitability of tragedy.

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