

The Significance of Hunting : “The Bear” and “Delta Autumn”

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Abstract : The aim of this paper is to discuss the significance of hunting in “The Bear” and “Delta Autumn”, the fifth and sixth stories in William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* (1942). In this paper, I would like to show that hunting plays an important role in Faulkner’s Southern society, referring to the studies of Maria Mies, a German sociologist. In her view, hunting is useful to a patriarchal society, which strictly distinguishes men from women. As a part of a social system, hunting succeeds in giving men absolute power. In the above-mentioned stories, hunting is portrayed as a factor of male-chauvinism. The white women in the stories are described as inferior socially and morally. Moreover, the black men and women in the stories are described similarly. White men find some utility value in both of them and often take control of their lives. On the other hand, white women and blacks know well their own unfavorable situations, secretly surmise white men’s possible acts and try to make them act as they like. Their acts look like a game, but they have to act like that because of their society, a part of which hunting has formatted. I would like to investigate the effects of hunting in the stories, paying attention to gender and race.

Keywords : William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, Maria Mies, gender, race

1. Introduction

It is true that critics have already discussed the meaning of hunting in Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*, but in this paper I would like to discuss hunting in terms of gender and race. The reason is that hunting reflects a Southern society in *GDM* and is useful to justify men’s exclusive privilege and women’s and blacks’ unfavorable positions. Hunting dates back to olden times, and this fact helps to convince people that hunting is necessary in the formation of a society. The image and social role of hunting lead to the idea that women and blacks are classified into categories of “nature” and “things which hunters can exploit.” White men find some utility value in women and blacks as well. Therefore, women’s and blacks’ survival depends on whether they can take advantage of the social rules and control white men who try to exploit them. Even if women’s and blacks’ dealings with white men looks like a game, they are the disadvantaged, and their survival depends on their actions. In this essay, I would like to discuss the significance of hunting in a Southern society.

2. “The Bear” and Maria Mies’ view of hunting

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In “The Bear” and “Delta Autumn”, it is remarkable that women and blacks are identified as “nature” or “things like land and animals.” Such things are white men’s possessions or objects of utilization. “The Bear” and “Delta Autumn” are hunting stories, and in these two stories, people are evaluated according to hunters’ value judgments. It is true that non-white people like Sam Fathers join hunters’ groups, but in fact, the group is a hierarchical society, which sets great store on a man’s lineage and presumes that women and children are excluded; “... even though Boon’s was a plebeian strain of it and only Sam and Old Ben and the mongrel Lion was taintless and incorruptible” (*GDM* 183: underlines mine). The distinction of sex and blood dictates hunters’ value judgments. 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. Only men are allowed to enter nature and to hunt animals, while women are prohibited from participating. Spending a certain period of time there gives them a sense of privilege. It seems that they try to show their superiority and need other people to be inferior to them. In “The Bear”, not having a family, in other words, not having a spouse and a descendant, is regarded highly. According to their view, “to get married to a woman”, “to have affairs with a woman” and “to have a family and a child” are all causes for needs of materials and greed for possessions. Because men consider women to be evil and greedy, to exclude women and feminine things elevates men’s spirituality. While men have antipathy to women, a hunter’s world involves femininities. First, an annual hunting trip by Ike and others is called “rendezvous”, and they, in fact, have no hope to capture Old Ben; “... to keep yearly rendezvous with the bear which they did not even intend to kill” (*GDM* 186: underline mine). It is an apt word for hunters who catch a glimpse of Old Ben and thereby satisfy themselves. It is possible to interpret their feelings for Old Ben as their desire to become one with nature, in other words, “desire to return to a mother’s body.” If wilderness, where Old Ben lives, represents immemorial nature, it means that hunters act in a world which embodies femininity. On one hand, hunting emphasizes masculinity because it is an act which risks a hunter’s life. On the other hand, it involves femininity, which is opposite to masculinity. To understand this significance, a citation from “The Bear” is useful:

Because he recognised now what he had smelled in the huddled dogs and tasted in his own saliva, recognised fear as a boy, a youth, recognises the existence of love and passion and experience which is his heritage but not yet his patrimony, from entering by chance the presence or perhaps even merely the bedroom of a woman who has loved and been loved by many men. (*GDM* 195: underlines mine)

Ike compares Old Ben’s masculinity with a woman’s femininity on the point that both of them teach him some truths on a non-verbal level. Old Ben teaches him irrational feelings and becomes identified with women in general because of women’s closeness to nature. After Ike leaves his pistol and magnet and enters the wilderness, he can encounter Old Ben. He shows his masculinity because he makes up his mind to be swallowed by nature. However, being swallowed by nature is similar to “a desire to return to a mother body”, and staying in a hunting world which involves femininity, suggests that a hunter will

not be able to escape from a desire for possession. In terms of nature and materials, the contrast between masculinity and femininity is repeatedly described.

Maria Mies is a German sociologist and eco-feminist, who discusses the establishment of capitalism and economy in relation to nature. She points out that a nation makes nature its private property. Placed on the same level with nature, women are also thought of as a nation's private property and are exploited. The system has supported capitalism. In *Women: The Last Colony*, she states, "What do these excluded beings - women and the colonies - have in common? First, both are defined out of so-called social production and placed within - or more accurately demoted to - the 'realm of nature',..." (Mies 4). This idea is based on those of capitalism and colonialism; "They were expected to produce life in the widest sense. Not only were women to bear and care for the next generation of wage-workers, but also to maintain the home and private sphere as a 'nature' reserve in which the exhausted and alienated wage-workers could regain their humanity" (Mies 5). Similar to black people, women are thought of as possessions, such as natural resources, by white men; "Women and subjugated peoples are treated as if they did not belong to society proper, as constituted from (male) wage-workers and capitalists. Instead, they are treated as if they were means of production or 'natural resources' such as water, air and land. [...] What is paramount is to *possess* these 'means of production'; the relationship with them is one of *appropriation* - the prerequisite for the emergence of the central relation of production between wage labour and capital, which in turn allows women and the colonies to be appropriated as 'natural resources'" (Mies 5). Also in "The Bear" and "Delta Autumn" lands and women are identified as useful and exploitable things and white men take advantage of them to satisfy their material or sexual desire.

The death of Old Ben in chapter 3 coincides with the end of the hunters' good old times. As well, this scene also reminds us of femininity. Lion, a wild Airedale, corners Old Ben, but Old Ben does not knock Lion down. Instead, they fall down together; "It caught the dog in both arms, almost loverlike, and they both went down" (*GDM* 230: underline mine). This scene emphasizes a sense of unity between the three, Old Ben, Lion and Boon. When others notice Sam Fathers, he has already fallen on the ground. It presages his approaching death. In the last part of this chapter, Cass comes to the fore. He tells Ike to go back to school, but General Compson allows Ike to stay in the camp by insisting that Ike has a better aptitude to be a hunter than Cass, who is already involved in a farm and a bank. Cass' involvement in a farm and a bank disqualifies him from becoming an excellent hunter. Moreover General Compson praises Ike for his courage to enter the wilderness having nothing with him. Nonetheless, after Section 4, Ike's spirituality is not praised from such a hunter's viewpoint. At the end of Section 3, Cass asks Boon whether he helped Sam Fathers end his life. Because Sam Fathers has no relatives, is advanced in age, and is descended from an Indian family, the moral problem of his mercy killing is not pursued. However, Cass does not hesitate to ask Boon whether Sam Fathers' death is a mercy killing. It shows that now Cass' modern sense of value corresponds to the change of the times properly.

Hunting scenes end in Section 3, and after Section 4, hunting is used only as a metaphor. When Ike becomes twenty-one, he is confronted with a problem concerning patrimony and discusses it with

Cass. Although Ike is a paternal descendant of old Carothers, he tries to give up his birthright and give his family's land to Cass, who is on the distaff side. Ike insists that land belongs only to God and He gives it to people. Then, in Ike's view, when God cannot expect Indians to take care of the land, He substitutes other people for them, in this case, white people:

Maybe He saw that only by voiding the land for a time of Ikkemotubbe's blood and substituting for it another blood, could He accomplish His purpose. Maybe He knew already what that other blood would be, maybe it was more than justice that only the white man's blood was available and capable to raise the white man's curse, more than vengeance when -'
(GDM248: underlines mine)

Ike thinks that because God knows what He can expect from white people, only white people can be responsible for the curse which is put on white people. Ike talks as if to indicate "white man's curse", he clearly regards only white people as chosen people, people who can act responsibly. It shows that Ike is class-conscious as strongly as other Southerners.

Ike and Cass reconsider the sin of old Carothers, who takes advantage of people as if they were his private property. The relationship between a possessor and a person possessed by him overlaps with a situation where a hunter possesses hunted things. Theophilus (Uncle Buck) and Amodeus (Uncle Buddy), old Carothers' descendants, write down only the utility values of their slaves in the family's ledger. Even if they are comparatively conscientious slaveholders, in their ledgers, their slaves are merely "commodities."

While Ike has an antipathy toward old Carothers, he regards blacks as white men's possessions and finds payment the only way to get clear of his family's sin. Ike tries to find some signs of the love between old Carothers and Eunice, his black slave. None the less, the reason is that he wants to believe that old Carothers thinks of Eunice as "*not just an afternoon's or a night's spittoon*" (GDM 258). What attracts his attention about Eunice's death is not why she commits suicide, but why his uncle writes Eunice commits suicide. Fonsiba, a descendant of Eunice, gets married to a black man whose father served on the side of the North in the Civil War. After she leaves him, Ike finds out where she lives and arranges it that she directly receives three dollars every month. By doing this, he feels as if he were discharging his duty.

Old Carothers asks for slaves and land as objects of his desire, and his character overlaps those of hunters who hunt animals to show their masculinity. Here I would like to look into Maria Mies' theory contrasting "men as hunters" with "women as gatherers." Her theory indicates that a woman has a body to bear a child, while a man has no choice but to wield a weapon in order to show his power. A woman can get food for her family by gathering, but a man is in the position of having to kill animals using a weapon.

First, we see that women can experience their whole body as productive, not only their hands

or their heads. Out of their body they produce new children as well as the first food for these children. (Mies 74: underlines mine)

They cannot *experience* their own bodies as being productive in the same way that women can. Male bodily productivity cannot appear as such without the mediation of external means, of tools, whereas woman's productivity can. [...] The conception which men have of their own bodily nature, the imagery they use to reflect upon themselves is influenced by the different historic forms of interaction with external nature and the instruments used in this work-process. Thus male self-conception as human, that is as being productive, is closely linked to the invention of tools and the control of technology. (Mies 77: underlines mine)

The biological distinction between a man and a woman leads to a system where a man's role is that of a hunter and a woman's is that of a gatherer. However, most foods in a family's daily life come from a woman's gathering, and so a man's hunting fails to satisfy a family's needs and is not adequately justified:

It has been proved conclusively, particularly by the critical research of feminist scholars, that the survival of mankind has been due much more to 'woman-the-gatherer' than to 'man-the-hunter', in contrast to the assertions of social-Darwinists, old or new. Even among existing hunters and gatherers women provide up to 80% of the daily food, whereas men contribute only a small portion by hunting. (Mies 79: underlines mine)¹

Despite this, men have power and become superior to women because they have tools or weapons:

a) The hunters' main tools are not instruments to produce life but to destroy life. Their tools are not basically means of production, but means of destruction, and they can also be used as means of coercion against fellow human beings.

b) This gives hunters a power over living beings, both animals and human, which does not arise out of their own productive work. They can appropriate not only fruits and plants (like gatherers) and animals, but also other (female) producers by virtue of arms. (Mies 82: underlines mine)

As a result, hunting enables men to resort to force and gives them absolute power.

In "The Bear", hunters go hunting and ascertain their superior position in their society. Nevertheless, people no longer need to follow a hunter's sense of value in order to evaluate people. An idea that compares a man to a hunter is useful to justify men's desire for possession, but to think of others as possessions or inferior things shows that the idea is heavily biased.

A white male-dominated society develops from the idea that "a man is a hunter." If people who are

exploited do not protect themselves, they will follow the road to ruin. None the less, if they could control exploiters under the pretense of the exploited, they would consolidate some positions in society. The former are Old Ben and Sam Fathers, and the latter are blacks and women. It is true that blacks are exploited by white men, but they produce descendants, anticipate how their exploiters will act and secretly make their exploiters act as they like. Shown in Thadious M. Davis' study of Tomey's Turl's acts and words in *Games of Property*, the exploited take advantage of the situation of hunting. In the world of hunting, not only hunters but also animals, hunters' targets, use tactics. Sam Fathers can stay isolated because he does not have a relative, but he lets his family line die out. According to a hunter's sense of value, Sam Fathers is highly regarded, but blacks have vital energy to survive and adapt to a modern world. A child between old Carothers and his female black slave is "a black", and the child has no choice but to gain a favorable situation even by betting himself on a game. When his child of mixed blood is a boy, some domestic tragedy happens. However, blacks' strength is not to despair of their masters' exploitation and not to let their family line die out. As if they were foxes or does in a hunting game, they easily become white men's possessions. Therefore, their survival depends on how correctly they can read their owners' minds and react to them. Though Ike insists that blacks are "better than whites" and blacks' bad characteristic is a copy of whites', blacks actually have no choice but to take advantage of their position of being the exploited and make whites conscious of their morality and conscience. Different from Ike's romantic figure of blacks, blacks have to be strong-minded not to let their blood line die out. They are not purely innocent because they have not had a sense of property for two hundred years while whites have had. They anticipate and secretly control white "exploiters," "pursuers (hunters)" because they know they are in the inferior position of being the exploited, "being pursued and hunted."

An episode of Ike's wife is introduced right after Ike's conversations with Cass, and this development shows that to have a spouse is closely connected to a matter of owning properties. Though his future wife mentioned her expectation of his title to the land, Ike, a simple carpenter, married the woman without considering what she wanted. He does not think about her character seriously until she clearly states that his title to the land is a bargaining point for sexual intercourse. Similar to a black, she is regarded as inferior, but the woman succeeds in making sexual intercourse with her a bargaining point for the McCaslins' land. This is another strategy of the exploited, to reverse her spouse's superior role and her inferior position by asking for properties in exchange for sexual intercourse. Because he believes a woman is supposed to fall into a man's possession and is biologically made to provide descendants for her spouse, Ike has not thought about his wife's mentality.

3. "Delta Autumn"

In "Delta Autumn", white men contrast a black woman with a doe, an object of hunting. While hunting, Roth Edmonds, a descendant of the Edmonds, spends nights outside a hunting camp, and the other hunters notice that it is a woman that he is chasing after. In a scene of "Delta Autumn", a hunter

points out that with the passage of time, hunting may be forbidden. Then Roth expresses his opinion. In his opinion, there will always be a large number of women and children in the world even if many people become unemployed. His opinion seems to imply that a woman will have sexual intercourse with a man, get pregnant and give birth to a child, but he also discloses his arrogance because he considers women and children as something he can put under his control and can use as some resource. Now hunters are not what they used to be, and they are aware of their own materialism. They act when they can get some possible benefits. When they stay with Ike, who is inclined to spiritualism, they feel uncomfortable as if Ike pointed out their corruption. However, they believe that simply "luck" makes a man good or evil. While they talk, one of them states that luck, opportunity and chance make their environment. And he continues to state that most men can be better than others if they can get a chance, and suggests that Roth is different from most men. They figuratively talk about Roth. In their eyes, he chases "a doe" every night, but he does not hunt too many does and can avoid making them extinct. This shows that he is not competent as a hunter but his luck is not so bad. Clearly their rhetoric contrasts men's nature with their way of hunting. A young hunter stop killing does because does may disappear after a few years. Different from the times when hunters went hunting without minding their targets' power to survive, white men think about not making their targets extinct in order to make hunting feasible. White men become sensitive to their possible profits, and their materialism is shown in their interest in hunting, and its aspects of "entertainment" and "game." A hunter's selfish pursuit of profits determines the luck of those who are exploited. It is arbitrarily determined and the process has some elements of "play."

In "Delta Autumn", Roth's lover of mixed blood gives birth to a boy, Roth's son, and she is so deeply involved with Roth that it is virtually impossible for Roth to clear up their relationship by giving her consolation money. She is in a socially inferior position because she is a black woman's daughter. Nevertheless, her incest, her intercourse with Roth results in the birth of a "black" son of the Edmonds, and this fact makes her impossible to overlook. As a result of her free love and cohabitation, she gives birth to Roth's child, and what she asks for is not money but Roth's letter to her and his "horn." She faces Ike and clearly states that Ike's inadequate relinquishment of land corrupts Roth as well. In addition, when Ike tells her to go to the North and marry a black man, she asks him as follows, "Old man, [...] ...have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you dont remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?" (*GDM* 346). Not only does she tell Ike, a male descendant of the McCaslins, about the truth about his birthright, but also she does not show even a slight sign of desire for money and shows her love is purely spiritual. This situation reflects the reverse of a hunter's role and his target's. Roth's lover chases Roth, who goes to hunt a doe. As Roth states that women and children will not disappear from this world, his lover gives birth to a boy and more mixed- blood descendants of the Edmonds will be born. We can see that the positions of the superior and the inferior are reversed.

4. Conclusion

Taking these points into consideration, we can conclude from the two stories that hunting is socially and systematically used to deny abilities of the inferior, women and blacks, but in actuality the inferior take advantage of this framework of society.

Key to Abbreviation

GDM William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*. New York: Vintage International, 1990.

Notes

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¹ For further reading, see "6 From Man the Hunter to Woman the Gatherer" in Part II of Elizabeth Fisher's *Women's creation : sexual evolution and the shaping of society*.

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