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電子紀要トップへ

On the Relation between Man and Nature in Faulkner and Thoreau

Michio Yorifuji

1 .

Nature is the very fundamental element of the world of American literature and thought.

Many writers and poets well-known for their writings and poems of nature have appeared since the colonial period. They are, for example, James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), Henry David Thoreau (1817-62), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64), Walt Whitman(1819-92), Mark Twain (1835-1910), John Muir (1838-1914), Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) and William Faulkner (1897-1962), etc..

American history is strikingly characterized by the contrast between wilderness and civilization. These two factors are in sharp contrast, and, in a sense, America can be said to have been the product of the conflict between them. This is the situation which is quite different from that of the European countries. The process of American history has been that of the“ coming across ”between the wave from the frontier and that from the highly civilized East Coast. So has been the process of the history of American literature and thought.

In this paper the author considers how nature works in American writings by focusing the two very well-known writers, William Faulkner and Henry David Thoreau. Both of them very much loved the woods of each native land and they thought over the deep relation between man and nature. Exactly speaking, they thought over man through nature.

2 .

William Faulkner is a“ Southerner ”(Mississippean) and Henry D. Thoreau a“ Northerner ”(New Englander). Their backgrounds are quite different from each other. Faulkner is a writer of the old families of the South (Mississippi). He wrote the decline of the traditional old families (planters) of the South and the rise of the new upstart people like the Snopes families. However, some of his important works belong to the best writings of nature in American literature. They are, for instance,“ The Bear ”,“ Delta Autumn ”and“ Red Leaves ”, etc.. A part of *Sartoris* (1929) also shows a very impressive and unforgettable scene of nature.

In“ The Bear ”Faulkner tells an initiation story of a boy Ike (Isaac) McCaslin, who is a descendant of the old family in“ Yoknapatawpha County ”, Mississippi.“ The Bear ”, a medium-length story, originally appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* on May 9, 1942. Soon after that it was widely improved, and contained in *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories* (1942). We also find“ Delta Autumn ”in this book.

" The Bear "is a hunting story in which Ike learns much from Sam Fathers about the old big woods and a big bear named" Old Ben ", a mysterious but sacred symbol of the big woods. Sam Fathers, tutor of Ike, is an old hunter who is a son of Ikkemotubbe, an Indian chief of the Chickasaw tribe, and his slave negress. Sam was once together with his mother a slave of a big plantation owner Carothers McCaslin, Ike's grandfather. Old Sam is an expert in hunting and knows everything about the big woods.

Ike McCaslin for the first time went hunting into the woods with Sam Fathers and other town people including General Compson, Major de Spain, Tennie's Jim and his father, etc., when he was ten years old. The next year he could finally encounter Old Ben because he alone went into the deep woods without any of the conveniences of modern life such as guns and compasses according to Sam's teachings. Ike learned to devote himself to the woods, that is, to nature.

In chapter 4 the family history of McCaslin becomes clear. Ike's grandfather Carothers McCaslin once commited an impermissible crime in humanity. He made his slave negress bear him a female child and later he also had relations with her, the child herself. At the age of twenty-one Ike decides to refuse to inherit his own profaned plantation which has been expanded by his father and uncle. That is, he relinquishes all his heritage to his relative McCaslin Edmonds. Ike becomes a mere carpenter in" Jefferson ". We can find an image of Jesus Christ of Nazareth in him.

At any rate chapter 4 is different from other chapters in character.

In the last chapter (Chapter 5) Old Ben is killed after all by a huge hunting dog" Lion " and Boon Hogganbeck, an inheritor of Chickasaw blood. But severely wounded Lion also

A part of the Delta, Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, where people used to hunt but we now see only fields. Photo by the author. (1984)

dies. Sam Fathers dies, too, and he is buried beside Lion. Ike McCaslin learns a great deal

from the death of Old Ben and Sam Fathers. Both Old Ben and Sam were incorruptible. They were, as it were, nature itself. No land was originally owned by man. Land belonged to land itself, and it had no relation with anything like a land ledger.

Major de Spain sells the timber-rights to a Memphis lumber company.

When a log-train comes into the wilderness, a bear“ broke frantically and took the first tree it came to. ”

> Not five years ago Walter Ewell had shot a six-point buck from this same moving caboose, and there was the story of the half-grown bear: the train's first trip in to the cutting thirty miles away, the bear between the rails, its rear end elevated like that of a playing puppy while it dug to see what sort of ants or bugs they might contain or perhaps just to examine the curious symmetrical squared barkless logs which had appeared apparently from nowhere in one endless mathematical line overnight, still digging until the driver on the braked engine not fifty feet away blew the whistle at it, whereupon it broke frantically and took the first tree it came to: an ash sapling not much bigger than a man's thigh and climbed as high as it could and clung there, its head ducked between its arms as a man (a woman perhaps) might have done while the brakeman threw chunks of ballast at it, and when the engine returned three hours later with the first load of outbound logs the bear was halfway down the tree and once more scrambled back up as high as it could and clung again while the train passed and was still there when the engine went in again in the afternoon and still there when it came back out at dusk;...
>
> “ The Bear ”, Chapter 5

Ike enters into the woods where he is to see Boon.

> —; summer, and fall, and snow, and wet and saprife spring in their ordered immortal sequence, the deathless and immemorial phases of the mother who had shaped him (Ike) if any had toward the man he almost was, mother and father both to the old man born of a Negro slave and a Chickasaw chief who had been his spirit's father if any had, whom he had revered and harkened to and loved and lost and grieved: and he would marry someday and they too would own for their brief while that brief unsubstanced glory which inherently of itself cannot last and hence why glory: and they would, might, carry even the remembrance of it into the time when flesh no longer talks to flesh because memory at least does last: but still the woods would be his mistress and his wife.
>
> “ The Bear ”, Chapter 5

At the end of this story Ike comes out of the woods into the old clearing, with the solitary gum tree directly before him.

At first glance the tree seemed to be alive with frantic squirrels. There appeared to be forty or fifty of them leaping and darting from branch to branch until the whole tree had become one green maelstrom of mad leaves, while from time to time, singly or in twos and threes, squirrels would dart down the trunk then whirl without stopping and rush back up again as though sucked violently back by the vacuum of their fellows' frenzied vortex. Then he saw Boon, sitting, his back against the trunk, his head bent, hammering furiously at something on his lap. What he hammered with was the barrel of his dismembered gun, what he hammered at was the breech of it. The rest of the gun lay scattered about him in a half-dozen pieces while he bent over the piece on his lap his scarlet and streaming walnut face, hammering the disjointed barrel against the gun-breech with the frantic abandon of a madman. He didn't even look up to see who it was. Still hammering, he merely shouted back at the boy in a hoarse strangled voice:

"Get out of here! Don't touch them! Don't touch a one of them! They're mine!"

"The Bear", Chapter 5

Boon's desperate shout symbolically shows what Faulkner most wanted to say in this story.

In"Delta Autumn"Uncle Ike (Ike (Isaac) McCaslin), an old man, goes hunting in November as usual into the woods ("the Delta") with Roth Edmonds, Will Legate and others.

Now they must drive a car 200 miles from their town"Jefferson"to arrive in the wilderness in which they can still hunt. Once (sixty years ago) it was just 30 miles from "Jefferson".

Since then wilderness has been being conquered by men.

The old man Uncle Ike"first started hunting in this bottom sixty years ago with old General Compson and Major de Spain and Roth's grandfather and Will Legate's too." To the old man among those who in caravan ground on through the ceaselessly dissolving afternoon, with skid-chains on the wheels now, lurching and splashing and sliding among the ruts it seemed that:

the retrograde of his remembering had gained an inverse velocity from their own slow progress, that the land had retreated not in minutes from the last spread of gravel but in years, decades, back toward what it had been when he first knew it: the road they now followed once more the ancient pathway of bear and deer, the diminishing fields they now passed once more scooped punily and terrifically by axe and saw and mule-drawn plow from the wilderness' flank, out of the brooding and immemorial tangle, in place of ruthless mile-wide parallelograms wrought by ditching the dyking machinery.

Old Ike also watches“ even the last puny marks of man—cabin, clearing, the small and irregular fields which a year ago were jungle and in which the skelton stalks of this year ’s cotton stood almost as tall and rank as the old cane had stood, as if man had had to marry his planting to the wilderness in order to conquer it—fall away and vanish. ”(“ The Bear ”, Chapter 5).

Old Ike recalls himself of the age of twelve and Sam Fathers in the woods.

In the tent in the rain old Ike“ lay on his back his eyes closed, his breathing quiet and peaceful as a child ’s, listening to it—that silence which was never silence but was myriad. ” (“ Delta Autumn ”).

> He could almost see it, tremendous, primeval, looming, musing downward upon this puny evanescent clutter of human sojourn which after a single brief week would vanish and in another week would be completely healed, traceless in the unmarked solitude. Because it was his land, although he had never owned a foot of it. He had never wanted to, not even after he saw plain its ultimate doom, watching it retreat year by year before the onslaught of axe and saw the log-lines and then dynamite and tractor plows, because it belonged to no man. It belonged to all; they had only to use it well, humbly and with pride. Then suddenly he knew why he had never wanted to own any of it, arrest at least that much of what people called progress, measure his longevity at least against that much of its ultimate fate. It was because there was just exactly enough of it. He seemed to see the two of them—himself and the wilderness—as coevals, his own span as a hunter, a woodsman, not contemporary with his first breath but transmitted to him, assumed by him gladly, humbly, with joy and pride, from that old Major de Spain and that old Sam Fathers who had taught him to hunt, the two spans running out together, not toward oblivion, nothingness, but into a dimension free of both time and space where once more the untreed land warped and wrung to mathematical squares of rank cotton for the frantic old-world people to turn into shells to shoot at one another, would find ample room for both—the names, the faces of the old men he had known and loved and for a little while outlived, moving again among the shades of tall unaxed trees and sightless brakes where the wild strong immortal game ran forever before the tireless belling immortal hounds, falling and rising phoenix-like to the soundless guns.

Old Ike grieves over the wilderness having been invaded by men and their civilization, because he himself and the wilderness itself were the“ coeval ” .

Ike tells the young woman, a mistress cast off by Roth, to go back north and marry a man of her own race, giving the“ General Compson ’s ”horn to their baby. She is a granddaughter

of Tennie's Jim (James Beauchamp). Roth Edmonds, Ike's relative, committed the same crime as their ancestor's over again. It's a great irony to Ike who once rejected all the tainted heritage of his family.

Young Bayard (Bayard Sartoris), hero of *Sartoris*, has been suffering from the tragical death of his brother John in the airfight against Germans during World War I. He strongly feels his responsibility for his brother's death. He is one of the typical nihilistic young persons in the après guerre age who are called "The Lost Generation". To leave his nightmare he puts himself in nature, that is, he goes to Virginius McCallum's house in the mountains after his grandfather's death in the car wreck.

Young Bayard goes hunting in the night with V. McCallum and his six sons. He is more gentle and obedient in the mountains than in the town. In the evening of Christmas Eve Bayard leaves the McCallum house and goes back on horse. On his way home he spends a night at a house of negroes' family. The negroes drink with him amicably and a little diffidently. He finds his peace of mind here, too.

Bayard leaves the town crowded with people at Christmas by train. He as a test pilot dies in Dayton, Ohio.

In *Sartoris* the hero goes into the mountains to hunt. He also stays at a negroes' house. Thus he can heal his wounded and miserable heart in the wilderness.

William Faulkner wished to be called a "Farmer." He lived in his home town Oxford ("Jefferson" in his novels), Mississippi. He didn't write New York but his home country northern Mississippi. He also loved Nagano of Japan where he stayed for the summer seminar of American literature in 1955. While in Nagano he also enjoyed seeing the agricultural district outside of central Nagano. He visited Lake Nojiri, too.

Faulkner had his own "Faulkner's Farm" in the outskirts of Oxford. He loved horse riding and hunting in the woods. He found peace and relief, even spiritual heal in nature.

Faulkner seems to have pursued the source and basis of human life in the wilderness, that is, in nature.

3.

Henry David Thoreau is the author of *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854) which is a classical masterpiece in the history of nature writings. He was an essayist, a poet, a natural historian, a surveyor, a traveller, a climber, a thinker and a pencil maker, etc.. He was antislavery, too. He was one of the transcendentalists in Concord, Massachusetts.

Thoreau was a peculiar genius who "sounded an alarm-bell" to the life of the people around him in town. He didn't like to live in such a way as most other people did.

Thoreau was thoroughly an individualist though quite in his own way. He was a disciple of Ralph Waldo Emerson who was a very famous transcendentalist and philosopher in Concord, but his character was quite different from that of Emerson, the "Sage of Concord". In a sense, he was more a transcendentalist than his teacher was. He was outside of Brook Farm,

the utopian community founded by George & Sophia Ripley in April, 1841 in West Roxbury, Massachusetts though Sterling F. Delano says there is a letter by George P. Bradford to R. W. Emerson which shows Thoreau ŝ visit to Brook Farm. Thoreau didn t belong to Fruitlands, either, which was established by Bronson Alcott in June, 1843 in Harvard, Massachusetts. He did things and thought almost alone though he had friends. He was quite a character in the neighborhood though a very harmless one. He had no regular employment though he graduated from Harvard College. These are things in common between Thoreau and Faulkner. (Faulkner had little college education.) Both men very often went on their own way.

Thoreau,“ a poet naturalist ”, published two books in his lifetime. They are ***A Week on the***

Walden Pond, Concord, Massachusetts. Photo by the author. (1984)

Concord and Merrimack Rivers (1849) and ***Walden, or Life in the woods*** (1854). His other writings are“ Civil Disobedience ”(1849), ***The Main woods*** (1864), ***Cape Cod*** (1865) and ***Journal*** (ed. B. Torrey and F. H. Allen, 1949), etc..

Thoreau tries to think about man through nature. He tries to observe things through nature. He is both a thinker and a practical doer. He goes to Walden Pond in the woods and lives an experimental life in a hut which he has built by himself. He lives there for “ two years, two months and two days ” (from Independence Day of July, 1845).

> I was seated by the shore of a small pond, about a mile and a-half south of the village of Concord and somewhat higher than it, in the midst of an extensive wood between that town and Lincoln, and about two miles south of that our only field known to fame, Concord battle-ground; but I was so low in the woods that the opposite shore, half a mile off, like the rest, covered with wood, was my most distant horizon.

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This small lake was of most value as a neighbour in the intervals of a gentle rain-storm in August, when, both air and water being perfectly still, but the sky overcast, mid-afternoon had all the serenity of evening, and the wood-thrush sang around, and was heard from shore to shore. A lake like this is never smoother than at such a time; and the clear portion of the air above it being shallow and darkened by clouds, the water, full of light and reflections, becomes a lower heaven itself so much the more important.

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Though the view from my door was still more contracted, I did not feel crowded or confined in the least. There was pasture enough for my imagination. The low shrub-oak plateau to which the opposite shore arose, stretched always toward the prairies of the West and the steppes of Tartary, affording ample room for all the roving families of men.

Walden

In his simple life in the“ pasture enough for my imagination ”, Thoreau thinks over the relation between nature and man. He is not a mere negative hermit. On the contrary, he is very positive, and he is very firm in his will to live his simple life significantly. He makes much of simplicity in a daily life. Thoreau thinks that most of what are regarded as useful to many people are, in fact, useless to them. He believes that people are in their daily life slaves to what isn t essential at all. Thus he insists on the necessity of what is essential to man and his life. He wishes to find and grasp things essential through the wilderness, that is, nature.

Thoreau loves animals and plants and closely watches them with his eyes both as a poet and as a naturalist.

Whether we live by the seaside, or by the lakes and rivers, or on the prairie, it concerns us to attend to the nature of fishes, since they are not phenomena confined to certain localities only, but forms and phases of the life in nature universally dispersed. The countless shoals which annually coast the shores of Europe and America are not so interesting to the student of nature as the more fertile law itself, which deposits their spawn on the tops of mountains and on the interior plains; the fish principle in nature, from which it results that they may be found in water in so many places, in greater or less numbers. The natural historian is not a fisherman who prays for cloudy days and good luck merely; but as fishing has been styled“ a contemplative man s recreation, ” introducing him profitably to woods and water, so the fruit of the naturalist s observations is not in new genera or species, but in new contemplations still, and science is only a more

contemplative man's recreation. The seeds of the life of fishes are everywhere disseminated, whether the winds waft them, or the waters float them, or the deep earth holds them; wherever a pond is dug, straightway it is stocked with this vivacious race. They have a lease of nature, and it is not yet out. The Chinese are bribed to carry their ova from province to province in jars or in hollow reeds, or the water-birds to transport them to the mountain tarns and interior lakes. There are fishes wherever there is a fluid medium, and even in clouds and in melted metals we detect their semblance. Think how in winter you can sink a line down straight in a pasture through snow and through ice, and pull up a bright, slippery, dumb, subterranean silver or golden fish! It is curious, also, to reflect how they make one family, from the largest to the smallest. The least minnow that lies on the ice as bait for pickerel looks like a huge sea-fish cast up on the shore. In the waters of this town there are about a dozen distinct species, though the inexperienced would expect many more.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," Saturday "

The above description is very living and full of the love of nature.

In such a way Thoreau comes in contact with nature. He thinks that nature makes man revive: wilderness makes man vital, wilderness gives man energy and health. In *Walden* Thoreau sings the praises of the rebirth of men.

Thoreau is at the same time a transcendentalist and a naturalist. He approaches nature not only intuitively and poetically but also scientifically. He not only feels nature but also watches it closely. Thus he becomes an originator in the field of" ecology. "He attaches importance to the harmony of man and nature because they are one. Thoreau has an strong belief that man can obtain vitality from wilderness itself.

Aldo Leopold refers to" Thoreau's dictum ": In wilderness is the salvation of the world. Though, in this case, Leopold thinks of the balance among the kinds of wild animals. (Aldo Leopold : *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949)

4 .

We clearly find something in common in Faulkner and Thoreau in their nature, wilderness, woods, wildness and land, etc., though they are quite different from each other in their native place and social background.

Both of these two writers very much loves nature and makes much of the relation between man and nature. They seem to have an belief that man can be reformed through nature. Thus Faulkner writes an initiation story of a young man Ike (Isaac) McCaslin in the woods. Thoreau believes in the rebirth of men in nature.

In Faulkner we always find the shadows cast by the traditional society, customs and families of the Deep South and those cast by the race problems, too, even when we think of

the theme of man in nature. In him we also often find historical elements and pessimistic atmosphere which are peculiar to the Deep South. On the contrary, Thoreau is quite an individualist of New England. He travels in or visits the wilderness, watches it very closely, thinks deeply and records everything worth recording.

Both Faulkner and Thoreau think over man through nature. However, Faulkner not only notices the initiation of a young man in the wilderness but also talks of the wilderness as a place for relief and even escape and consolation for those who are suffering from the stifling situation in the old tradition and customs of the Deep South. On the other hand, Thoreau finds a symbol of all things in nature and regards the wilderness as a place in which men can find the source of life and their resurrection. He tries to show the way people can free themselves from the yoke of their very worldly community and merely busy, tasteless daily life.

Faulkner and Thoreau learned much from nature. They got lessons from nature. Faulkner did so as a genuine Deep Southerner, Thoreau as a transcendental poet naturalist of New England.